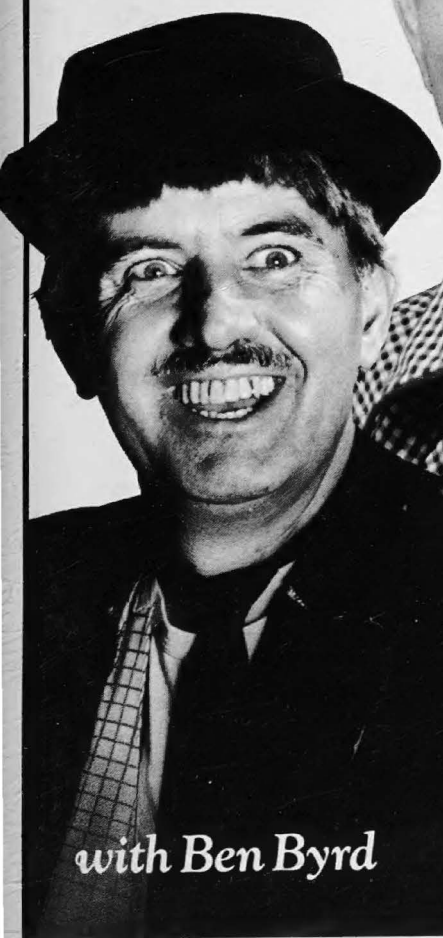
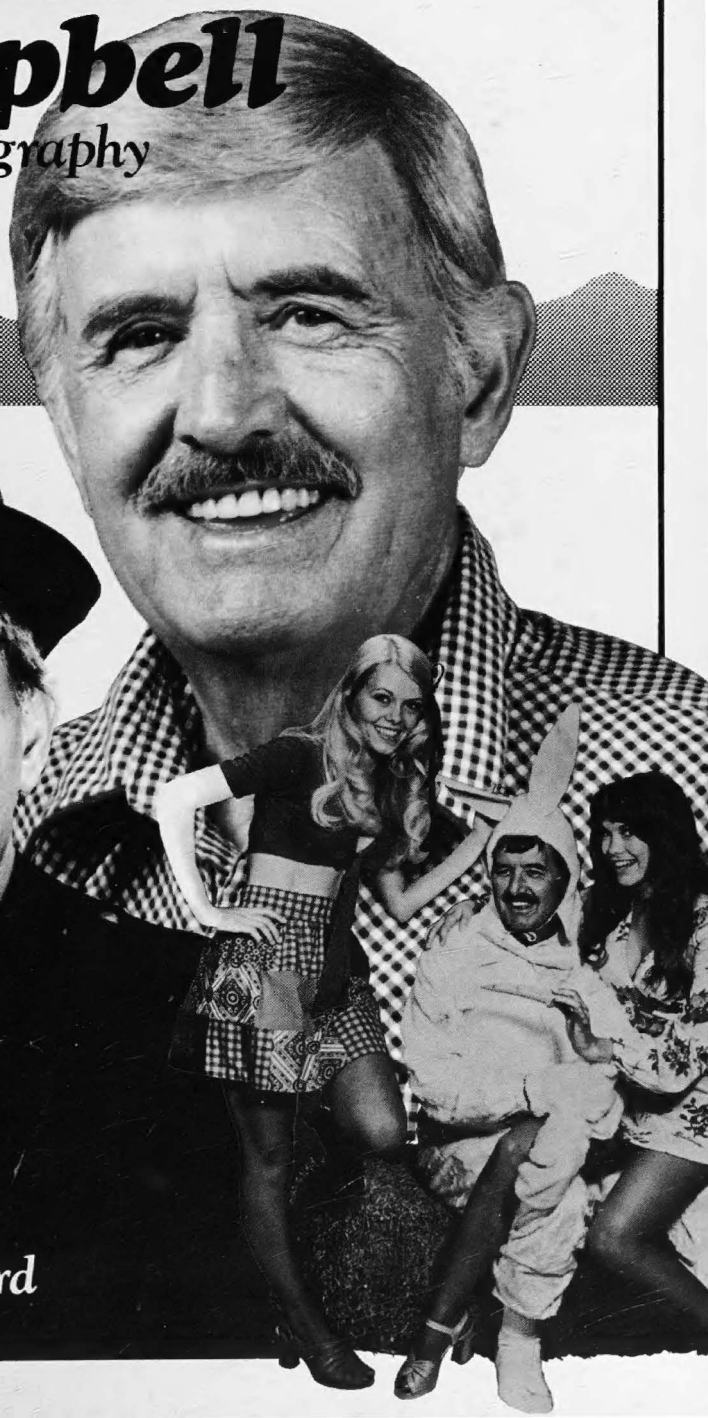


Archie Campbell

An Autobiography



with Ben Byrd



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Foreword by Hal Durham,
The Grand Ole Opry

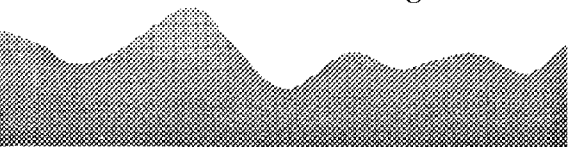
In a way, Archie Campbell's story is also the story of country music and humor on radio and television, for he was one of the pioneers.

Archie first went on radio as a country singer in 1936, when radio was still young. He struggled through the days of the Great Depression, when country music was certainly not a very well-paid industry.

As soon as television came to Knoxville, Archie had a regular show. From there he went on to national fame as a regular on the Grand Ole Opry and the TV show, "Hee Haw."

Archie recalls here his poverty-stricken childhood in the mountains of East Tennessee and his experiences working his way through college.

He reminisces about his life on the road as a travelling



Archie Campbell

An Autobiography
by Archie Campbell
with Ben Byrd



Memphis State University Press

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Foreword

I HOPE that Archie Campbell and his co-author, Ben Byrd, will not be too dismayed to learn that this book is the second and not the first heavily-researched and well-written story of Archie Campbell's life. As a journalism student at the University of Tennessee in the 1950s, I completed a feature-writing project by interviewing the most famous personality I knew and then composing what I regarded as a beautifully written piece about his life. The personality was Archie, of course, and had I been able to tell his story nearly as well as this book does, I could have improved my grade for that assignment substantially.

Archie has really influenced my life in many ways. When I worked at WROL Radio in Knoxville as a junior announcer, Archie was peaking as entertainer there, as he had just left the famous association with Lowell Blanchard at WNOX to head up his own shows at WROL. He was the top talent in town and to work with him was to enjoy a tiny bit of his success. He broadened my concept of country music, and I doubt that I would have ever become associated with WSM and the "Grand Ole Opry" had it not been for those enlightening days in Knoxville. When I was considering an announcing job at WSM in the mid 1960s, the only advice I sought was from Archie, who by that time was a regular on the Opry. He suggested that I take the job, and I did. Today, I still discuss problems with him, and he is still generous with his advice.

During those days in Knoxville, Archie invited me to his home many times, where his wife Mary fed a hungry young student large portions of delicious fried chicken and gravy, homemade biscuits, etc., and allowed me to share some of the warmth and love of their family. The two boys, Steve and Phil, cute little fellows then, have become very active in country music and seem to have avoided those problems which are sometimes associated with having a famous performer for a father. It was during the Knoxville days that I discovered that Archie is quite a gifted artist, and I persuaded him to give me a beautiful landscape which I treasure. A huge photographic enlargement of one of his paintings now covers an entire wall in the artists' lounge backstage at the Opry House.

While I was working at WROL, eating Archie's fried chicken and receiving my country music indoctrination, a young man was busy establishing himself as a sportswriter at *The Knoxville Journal*, where he learned under the premier sports columnist of that day, Tom Anderson. As a matter of fact, it was the daily exposure to the writing abilities of Tom Anderson and young Ben Byrd that convinced me to set aside my journalistic aspirations and concentrate on radio announcing. Ben and Archie have been close friends for a long number of years, sharing a common interest in golf and other sports; Archie is an outstanding golfer and a great sports fan. I think that Ben was the perfect choice to work with Archie as the collaborating author on this book, especially since I was not available for the assignment.

I hope you can deduce that I admire Archie Campbell very much. I consider it a privilege to have known him for so long and to be able to consider him my friend. I believe you will understand my feelings as you read this book.

Hal Durham
General Manager
"The Grand Ole Opry"

Archie Campbell

Bulls Gap

COUNTRY music has been good to me, and I like to think that maybe I've been good for it. I go a long way back in the business, back to the days when they called us "hillbillies," when we scraped out a living on local radio stations and played at county fairs and little theaters in small country towns. It wasn't called the country music industry then. It wasn't big enough to be an industry. It was just a few of us country folks, playing and singing our kind of music and making people laugh with our kind of comedy. We weren't taken very seriously by the other people in show business then; to them, we were hicks or cornballs.

Things have changed a lot since then. Like that old story they tell about Liberace, we country music folks are crying all the way to the bank now. Because we made it! We just kept picking and singing our way through the hard times, and finally people everywhere started paying attention to us. They found that we had something to give, something that is real and genuine and honest, something that is down-to-earth American. It wasn't any one artist who did it, either. It was a lot of them, going back to Jimmy Rodgers, the granddaddy of us all, even before my

time. It was Roy Acuff singing "The Great Speckled Bird" and Ernest Tubb and the Carter Family and Hank Williams. It was Chet Atkins, making his guitar stand up and talk, and Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard and modern-day country superstars like Willie Nelson and Roy Clark. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but I hope a little bit of it has been old Archie Campbell.

I've got success coming out of my ears these days. I'm on the "Hee Haw" television series and the "Grand Ole Opry." I've played Las Vegas and appeared on a lot of national TV shows. I've made some records that were pretty big hits. I've made hundreds, maybe thousands, of concert appearances, and in recent years I've been paid awfully good money for them.

I have a beautiful wife whom I've been married to for thirty-seven years and two fine sons who are now in the country music business themselves. I have a brand new house that is three stories high, if you count a full-sized basement, and it has an art studio that is equipped with fluorescent lights that create artificial daylight so that I can paint at night if I feel like it. Painting is really my first love, but I'll get into that later. I belong to the best golf clubs, own more cars than I need, and probably have more money than I'll ever be able to spend.

So I guess you could say that I have been successful in just about every way that success is measured. As far as I'm concerned, success is peace of mind and satisfaction with what I'm doing and, believe me, I feel that I'm a success when it's measured that way, too.

But success doesn't just happen. Nobody is born successful. Some may be born rich or talented, but that doesn't necessarily mean that success will follow. Some of the most miserable people I've ever known have been very wealthy and very talented. Personally, I don't think that we can really appreciate things unless we've had to work

hard to get them. I don't think we can really enjoy winning unless we know what it feels like to lose. I know how that feels. Let me tell you about my first venture into country music.

I don't know for sure how old I was. I'll say about ten. The Campbell family was living in Greene County, Tennessee, way up in the sticks. To pinpoint it for you, it was about a mile and a half from Skinner's Cross Roads. Everybody knows where that is. Now I always tell people that I'm from Bulls Gap, but that's putting on the dog a little bit. Actually, Bulls Gap was four miles away.

Anyway, there we were, just old country people, and since this was before either radio or television came along, we sort of had to provide our own entertainment. To tell the truth, I don't know that it would have made any difference if there had been radio and TV; we were too poor to have afforded either one. But we were musically inclined, and so to help pass the time away my two sisters and I used to sing together in three different parts, and I had visions of us being a great trio of some sort. The only hitch was we needed instruments. I was able to borrow a guitar from a neighbor from time to time, and I could pick it enough to get by. I figured that we needed another instrument for one of my sisters if we were really going to be a high-powered group, but Lord knows we didn't have the money to buy one with.

You older folks may remember a product called Cloverine Salve that was advertised in magazines back then. Well, they offered a deal where, if you sold a dozen of those boxes or cans of Cloverine Salve, you got a ukelele. "That's it," I said, when I read it. I hustled all over those Greene County hills and finally—I don't know how long it took—but finally I sold all of them and sent off for my ukelele. Every day I would watch for the mailman, and after

two or three weeks, the old boy finally tooted his horn one day, and I ran down the hill to the mailbox and, sure enough, there it was—a brand new ukelele. I don't think I've been that thrilled again to this day.

I brought it back up to the house as fast as I could run and told my sister Irene, "Now, this is your ukelele. You're going to learn to play it, and then you and me and Pauline (the youngest sister) are going to have us a trio." She was tickled to death and so was Pauline. We couldn't wait to try it out.

We had this favorite place to go and do our singing, a big old empty field that grew nothing but sage grass. So we tore down that hill like a bunch of wild Indians, and Irene fell and broke that ukelele into a thousand pieces! We hadn't had it thirty minutes. Irene started crying because she had hurt her toe. I started crying because she had broken the ukelele. Pauline, who was too young to understand the gravity of the situation, just stood there and stared at us. We came dragging back up the hill carrying pieces of the ukelele, and that was the end of the trio and the end of my first experience in country music.

That part of Greene County is still rather remote, but it was downright primitive when I was born there on November 7, 1914. We had to travel a mile and a half just to reach the road that led to Greeneville, ten miles away. Today Interstate 81 passes within a hundred yards of the place where I was born. Later on we moved to a place nearer Bulls Gap, and since I went to school there, I've always claimed Bulls Gap as my hometown.

My father, James Thomas Campbell, was an engineer for Southern Railway. I never really felt that I knew my father well when I was a kid. I think this was because in those days a lot of parents, especially fathers, felt that kids should be seen and not heard, and so there just wasn't any chance of getting close to him. Times have changed since

then, and I sure don't hold to that kind of thinking myself. I've always been very close to my two boys, and I think they're better off for it. Another thing was that Papa could just scare me to death. He was a great big guy, well over two hundred pounds, and he could be meaner than a snake. He didn't work too often, which was one reason we were so poor. He could drink more liquor and get in more fights than anybody in that part of the county, but he was my dad, and I'm just sorry that I never got to know him better.

While Papa was rough and tough, my mother was the exact opposite, the sweetest, gentlest woman I ever saw. Of course, she was the one that we kids always turned to for help. There were four of us children: my brother Harold, who was five years older than me, my two younger sisters, and myself.

It's amazing how far back in your past you can go when you start thinking about it. I can remember things very vividly that happened when I was a small child. I remember going down to visit my grandpa and grandma, who were my favorite people, and watching the creek come up during a rain, and Grandpa and Grandma sitting around reading the Bible or maybe an old newspaper. They didn't get a regular paper so they just kept everything they could to read. One day at home I was out in the berry patch, and I stuck a little green berry—a blackberry that was still green—up my nose and couldn't get it out. According to my aunt, I was three years old at the time. I ran to the house, but my mother didn't know what to do, and so she decided to take me to Grandpa's to see if he could fix it. On the way, we stopped at an uncle's house. He looked at me and said, "Put your finger on your nose and blow real hard." I did, and that berry popped right out of my nose and hit a newspaper lying on the ground. It sounded like a twenty-two rifle being fired. After that, my mother decided

we didn't need to go to Grandpa's after all, and she drug me back home with me bawling and squawling all the way. I had a notion to stick another berry up my nose.

The first school I went to was an old one-room school-house called Phillipi School. I can remember my teacher as if it were yesterday. Her name was Lizzie Snow, and I think I may have set an all-time record by getting paddled seven times in one day when I was in the first grade. The bigger boys in the room would take the little BB shot out of shotgun shells and flip them around the room with rubber bands. Miss Snow never caught them in the act, but when they would hit the floor, I would run and pick them up, and she would catch me and paddle me again. But she was a great little lady, and she loved me, and I loved her, too.

I guess I must have been a pretty smart little boy because I was advanced two full grades after that year. I thought it was great at the time, but I learned later that there were more bad things than good about skipping grades. It's unfair for a child to be put in a class with children two or three years older than he or she is. I know that in my case it hurt because I wasn't big enough and strong enough to play ball with the others through most of my school years, and that was hard to take for a boy who loved sports as much as I did. Years later, when I was on the Knox County School Board, people would come to me with their smart kids and want to get them advanced to the next class. I'd say, "Let's not do that," and then I'd tell them about my own experience. I don't know whether we convinced all the parents or not, but we didn't allow any double promotions because I knew it was wrong.

I guess I'm getting off the subject. After I left Phillipi School, I went to Mohawk School, and that was far enough away that I had to ride a bus to get there. The one thing I remember best about Mohawk School was the fight that I had one day with Paul Raider. Now, Paul was my best

friend, but we were mad at each other about something, and we were going to fight it out right there on the playground. All the other boys gathered around in a big circle, and we tore into each other. We hadn't been fighting very long before someone yelled, "Here comes Mr. Miles! Here comes Mr. Miles!"

Mr. Miles was Harmon Miles, and he was our principal and a really great man. But, if he caught you fighting, he would put the paddle to you pretty hard; so I figured I had to think of something quick. So I grabbed my old buddy Paul and started dancing with him. Mr. Miles came up and wanted to know what was going on, and I told him we were just playing, and we got away with it. I guess the reason the incident sticks out in my mind is because it sort of shows that I was able to think quick when I was on the spot, and goodness knows that has helped me a thousand times in this business I'm in, on the stage or in the studio when something would go wrong, and I would have to ad lib it as I went along.

Earlier I said something about having hard times before you can appreciate the good times. Well, I've always been able to appreciate just being alive because I'm just plain lucky that I ever grew up at all. Twice during those early years back in Greene County I was so sick that everybody just about gave up on me. The first time was when I was eight years old and got pneumonia fever. Brother, back then, when you got pneumonia fever, they figured you were a goner for sure. I guess I was lucky that I was too young to really understand it fully, but I remember old Doc Myers coming to the house and giving me some medicine and then whispering to my mother when he thought I couldn't hear him: "Well, Mrs. Campbell, I've done all I can do. The rest of it's in the hands of the Lord." I guess the Lord must have been looking out after me pretty well

because I made it all the way through, even though nobody expected me to do it.

The next time I got real sick was when I was twelve. I was with my Aunt Molly Pierce up in Elizabethton, and I went on a hike down by the river. It was a hot midsummer day, and I got so thirsty I was dying for a drink of water. Finally I ran across this nice cool-looking spring, and I just fell down and drank that water as hard as I could. Then I looked up and saw a sign that said, "Condemned." Well, I knew what that meant: Typhoid fever. That was a real killer back then. This time I was older, and I thought I was going to go myself. My hair came out; I could just reach up and take hold of a handful of it and out it would come. But somehow I lived through that, too, and I guess the Lord was still looking out for me.

After grammar school, I went to Bulls Gap High School, and while I have many fond memories of it now, I don't mind telling you that it wasn't all that much fun at the time, especially in the first couple of years. Remember, I was a couple of years younger than most of the others in my class, and that's tough on a boy who is competitive by nature and who wants to take part in sports. Then, too, you begin to feel social distinctions a little more as you get older, and for the first time being poor started to bother me. Now, there were a lot of poor people around Bulls Gap; most of them were. But we were the poorest by far; I mean, we were ragged.

To make things worse, there was a boy in my class who just seemed to have everything. He was from the richest family in town; I don't guess there were any really wealthy people there but by comparison he was pretty rich. He was good-looking and dressed fit to kill and, being two years older, he was much bigger and stronger than I was. He used to torment me. He would sit behind me in chapel (assembly) and flip me on the ear with his finger. He would

catch me out on the playground and just kick my tail for no reason at all. I don't know why he did it. Maybe it was because he was rich and I was poor, and he felt superior to me. It's hard to understand why kids do things like that, but they do. Anyway, he kept it up. I went out for basketball, and, of course, it turned out that he was the best player on the team. So he just continued to whip up on me on the court.

Then a strange thing happened. I made the basketball team, and in the summer between my junior and senior years I worked out in the fields and built up some muscles and got pretty darned strong. I decided that this guy had run over me for the last time. I was determined to at least stand up and take my part. When we got back to practicing basketball that fall, he would usually be the captain of one team and I'd be captain of the other, and we would scrimmage against each other. One day I was dribbling down the court, and he stuck his foot out and tripped me, and I fell for twenty feet. I waited for my chance. He came running down the floor, and I did the same thing to him, and down he went. He got up screaming at me. "You did that on purpose," he said.

"You're right," I said. "Now what are you going to do about it?"

We stood there glowering at each other, and I think he was relieved when the coach came over and broke it up. It's funny, but ever since that day we've been the best of friends. I run into him every once in a while, and he's a heck of a nice guy. The reason I've bothered to tell this little story is that I think that sooner or later every boy reaches the time when he has to stand up like a man and fight for his rights. Once you get past that fear, it's not really so hard to do.

I'll tell one more story about my high school days and then move on. This incident involved a pretty little girl

who was in my class. I always liked the girls, and I'll admit it—I still do. This one was really the apple of my eye at the time, and when our principal, Mr. Hoover, would leave the classroom, I would sneak back and sit down on the seat beside her. Well, one day Mr. Hoover came back in the room and saw me sitting there with her. He was a great big man, and I don't ever remember seeing him smile. He never said a word to me. He just walked up behind me and took his hand and hit me across the ear and knocked me plumb out in the aisle.

When I got home that day, my daddy saw how my ear was swollen and asked me what had happened. I told him the truth because I'll guarantee you, you didn't lie to my daddy. In fact, and this is getting off the subject again, but you shouldn't lie to anybody ever. I've always taught my boys that lying is just about the worst thing anybody can do. To me, a liar is a coward, and the reason he lies is because he's afraid of the truth. But getting back to the story, I would have been afraid to lie to my daddy, because he would have broken me in half if he found it out. So I told him what had happened. He didn't say a word. He just walked right out of the house.

I never would have found out what happened if a friend hadn't happened to be hanging around the school that day. My daddy just walked up to the principal and said, "Mr. Hoover, if my boy gets out of line, you can punish him the way you're supposed to. Get a switch or a paddle. But, if you ever lay your hand on him again, you're going to have me to put up with, and that ain't no easy job!"

Graduation day finally came, and I remember it well because we had thirteen members in the class, and we graduated on May 13, 1932. I also remember it because something happened that night that still warms my heart when I think of it. During my last two years in high school I had coached the eighth grade basketball team because I

enjoyed being with the kids and helping them learn. I also did odd jobs around the school and for a lot of people in town. Well, on graduation night it turned out that just about everybody in Bulls Gap had gotten together and chipped in and bought me a guitar. Not just a guitar, but a Martin guitar, the finest there was. It must have cost forty dollars. They had scaled their donations at five cents, ten cents, twenty-five cents and up to a half-dollar at the top. So what did I do? I just stood there on that stage and bawled like a baby!

College Days

It was September of 1932. I was not quite eighteen years old, and here I was setting out for college at Mars Hill, a two-year school in western North Carolina. The country was getting pretty well into the Depression by then, but I don't know that that made a lot of difference to the Campbells. We were already so poor that it could hardly have gotten any worse.

I guess most folks in Bulls Gap figured I didn't have any business going to college. Back then, that was something that people with money did, and I didn't have a dime. I mean that literally, not one dime, until my grandpa gave me twenty-five dollars just before I left. Lord knows how long he had been saving it. Thank heaven my father was a railroad man, and I could ride the train free on a pass. So I got my train pass and my trunk, and off I went to college. The best I remember, I had two dress shirts and one suit and a couple of pairs of old trousers, and that was it.

These days kids can work their way through college, and nobody looks down on them. In fact, they kind of admire them, but it wasn't that way back fifty years ago. There was a great difference in the attitude of people then, and at Mars Hill College you fell into one of two classes, the pay-

ing student or the working student. I always had the feeling that the others were looking down on me. Maybe they weren't; maybe I was just too sensitive about it. Anyway, I waited on tables for twenty cents an hour, and I hated it. Not the work, but having to wait on other students.

I'll be honest about it. Now, after all these years, I figure I was a big flop in college. I was too sensitive and too stubborn, and once I made up my mind about something nobody could tell me different. But, in a couple of ways, it did turn out to be a very profitable experience for me. One was my work in art. I had always been crazy to be an artist, and art was the only subject in college that I really did well in. I had a good teacher, Mrs. Bowden, and even though we sometimes fought like cats and dogs, we respected each other. She knew that I was doing the work, and I respected her for knowing so much about art, and she used to let me have the key to the studio on Sundays. I would go there and paint all day long instead of going out with the other kids. I made A's in art, but that was all.

Everybody was very complimentary of my work, and I was pretty well satisfied with it myself, but in art you're never really satisfied with anything you do if you're really dedicated. Just give it a little time and you can see a lot of mistakes. That's what makes art so great. You can study it all your life.

The other thing that sort of saved me at Mars Hill was music. I got involved in that, although I had no idea that it was to play such a big role in my life. I studied music theory and was in the chorus and took part in a number of music activities, but I never really thought about doing anything like that for a living. I also got into some of the theater work, and when I would be in a play, it always turned out that I got the comedy part. Somehow, although I was a very quiet sort of person, when I got on the stage, the things I said turned out to be funny. I did those parts

and enjoyed them, but I never really was interested in making a living at it until later when it became a matter of either doing that or starving to death. It just turned out that I couldn't make any money in art, and that's the reason I'm in show business right now. But that's a later story.

They were awfully strict with the students at Mars Hill in those days. Kids these days wouldn't believe some of the rules they had. If you dated a girl, where you went with her was to church on Sunday. If you held her hand, you didn't have another date with her for at least three weeks. Of course, that's not saying that there wasn't a little hanky-panky going on when nobody could see it. There was. But in my opinion the rules were just too strict. They're a lot better now. I think we have the same basic principles, but there's a lot more individual freedom, and that's the way it should be.

A lot of things happened that were big deals at Mars Hill then that wouldn't amount to a hill of beans now. One thing I remember, we used to have a pajama parade. That was when the guys at the dormitory would put on their pajamas and march to the girls' dorm. It wasn't anything very daring really; the girls would just pull their shades and not even bother to look at us most of the time. But this one year we had a very strict housemother whose first name was Elizabeth, and we made up this protest song about her. As we marched along on the pajama parade, we were singing, "Down with Beth, Down with Beth." I remember this fellow named Washburn, who was sort of the leader of the whole thing. He marched along playing the accordion, and the rest of us followed along behind. We got to the girls' dorm, and they would crack the shades a little and peep out once in a while, but that was all. There wasn't really anything happening that amounted to anything.



That's me (right) with a friend, Phillip Link, during college days at Mars Hill.

But, someone called this professor, Doctor Moore, and told him there was a problem on the campus. He was a great tall, funny-looking man who wore one of those detachable stiff collars. On this night he must have been in a hurry because he forgot to put his collar on, and since he had a big long neck, it made him funnier looking than ever. He started to make a speech to the young men and young women about the horrible thing we were doing, and somebody threw a tomato and hit him. He said, "Now,

young men and young women, there are some among you who are not loyal to your cause, and by tomorrow noon I will know every human being who was involved in this thing and whose idea it was, and those people will be expelled because there are those among you who will tell me." He was right. He got the three leaders, and they were expelled just like he said.

Now let me tell you about leaving Mars Hill. I'm not real proud of it, and as I look back, I think maybe I should have done differently. But I was mad as I could be at the time, and I had good reason to be. I was getting ready to graduate, and I had worked out an arrangement where I could work and make twenty-five dollars to buy myself the clothes I would need for graduation. The work was with the college and it was all agreed to, but when I went to get the money, the people involved (I won't mention any names) told me that a mistake had been made and that I owed the college some money and the twenty-five dollars would be applied to my bill. That meant that I wouldn't have any new clothes to graduate in.

I was so upset that I went back to my room and told my roommate that I was going to leave without graduating. I thought it over for a couple of days, but I was still just as mad as ever, so my roommate and I got my trunk, packed all my stuff in it and carried it out across the hill to the road. I caught a ride on a coal truck to Asheville, dragged my trunk two blocks along the street to the train station, and from there I caught the train to Knoxville. This was one week before I was supposed to graduate, and I never did go back.

I'm not trying to run Mars Hill down. It's a great school, and the people there now do a beautiful job of running it. I even served as the president of the Mars Hill alumni association a few years ago. I didn't think I really deserved

that honor, because I felt it should have gone to someone who had graduated, and I came up one week short.

Back in Bulls Gap, things were a lot worse than they had been before I left for college. By now it's the mid-1930s, and that was just about the rock bottom of the Depression. I didn't have anything to do. No job and no prospects of a job. I didn't have enough education to really be skilled at anything, and even if I had, nobody could have afforded to hire me, times were so bad. I'd sit around on the porch of the general store and look at all the other guys. They were just sitting around, too, wearing overalls and spitting tobacco juice, and I'd think, "My God, in another ten or fifteen years that's what I'll be like!" I've never been so depressed in my life.

On top of all that, my shoes were worn out. I didn't have any money to buy new ones with, and finally I just had to go to my daddy and ask him if he would buy me a pair. I guess I've already established that he was a pretty tough customer, and you can probably imagine how nervous I was about it. But one day I summoned up enough courage.

"Papa," I said. "My shoes are all worn out, and my feet are coming out through the bottom of them. I've got to have a new pair, and I don't know how I'm going to get them."

"Is that so?" Papa asked. "Big college man here with a big education can't even buy his own shoes. Ain't that something?"

I had never talked back to my daddy in my life, not because I was all that good, but because I was just too darned scared. But this time I did. Papa looked at me for a minute and then said, "Okay, go down to Sands (a railroad credit store) and get you a pair of shoes and charge them to me."

I said, "I don't want the damned shoes."

I thought sure he would explode, but he just said, "Growing up, ain't you, boy?" and turned away.

I never did go to Sands to get my shoes. I told my mother that I was going to leave home. I had been back home from college for a full year by then, and I had decided that I had to get away from Bulls Gap and make my own way, somehow. I spent the rest of the day making me a knapsack, or backpack, or whatever they call those things. You saw a lot of people on the road with them back in those days. I didn't have a bedroll or anything like that. I put in some canvasses and cardboard and anything else I could paint on, because that was the way I planned to make my living. I figured I would do some paintings and sell them for enough money to get by on. I also had my guitar strapped on my back.

So that's how I left Bulls Gap, carrying my artist's tools in my knapsack and my guitar on my back. My mother cried when I left, and I felt like crying myself. I had cardboard lining the bottoms of my shoes, and I knew I couldn't get very far walking. That was the Archie Campbell who set out to conquer the world in 1935, and when I say that you have to hit the bottom before you can ever appreciate the top, I'm talking from experience. Because that's where I was then—right on rock bottom.

On The Road

I WAS out on the open road. A lot of people were back in 1935, and I guess most of them were in better shape than I was. But I was young, twenty years old, and I had this notion that I was going to be somebody, somehow.

That first day I caught a ride after I got to the main highway. I didn't really have any idea of where I was going, but the ride I caught was going south, so I went south. After that one, I caught another one, and I wound up somewhere in Alabama at the end of the first day. I slept in a haystack that night.

The next morning when I woke up, I found out the hard way what it was like to be out on the road with no money at all. Lord, was I ever hungry! I had to get some food some way. So I started walking along these old dirt and gravel country roads, and I finally came to an old country store. It was an awful looking thing. It had never been painted, and it had those old signs all over that you used to see on country stores—Garrett Snuff, Prince Albert tobacco, and things like that. There was an old man sitting in the store looking out at the pasture field, and he looked as if he had been sitting there about a hundred years. I

walked up to him and said hello, and he said hello and then neither one of us said anything else for two or three minutes. Then I hit him with a plan.

I said, "You know, if you had a sign in that window there telling what store this is, it would look real nice. Be good for your business."

"Don't need no sign," he said. "Everybody knows where I am."

"Yeah, but it would really look good to have a sign there," I said. "Would you mind telling me your name?"

Well, he told me, and I've forgotten what it was now, but I'll say it was Brown. I said it would be nice to have a "J. S. Brown and Sons General Merchandise" sign in that window.

"Don't need no sign," he said. "Signs cost money. Everybody knows where I am."

I got a piece of paper and sketched out the letters, "J. S. Brown and Sons" and circled the top in a rainbow shape, and then under it in a straight line I put, "General Merchandise." I showed it to him.

"Don't need no sign," he said. "Everybody knows where I am."

I didn't say anything for a little while, and then he asked, "How much would it cost to have a thing like that done?"

I said, "I'd paint it in silver and white, and I guess it would be about fifty cents."

"I can't spend no money like that," he said. "Everybody knows where I am."

I said, "Well, would you be willing to just give me fifty cents worth of foodstuff for it?"

He said, "I might do that. Let's see how it looks."

So I went ahead and did the sign. I knew that it was taking a chance, because he might decide not to take it, but it was my only hope of getting something to eat. He looked

at it, and I could tell that he liked it, but he would have bitten off his tongue before he complimented me.

"That ain't too bad," he said. "Come on in here, and I'll give you fifty cents worth of food."

I made a big haul. Remember, these were Depression days when things didn't cost like they do now. I got a strawberry dope—that's what we called soda pop back then—and he said, "I guess you better have another one of those."

So I got two strawberry pops, and some sardines, and a couple of cans of pork and beans, and two boxes of crackers. Before I knew it, I had about sixty cents worth of groceries. Of course, food was what I had wanted anyway, but the fact that he wasn't going to have to give me any money appealed to him a lot more than paying out fifty cents for it. I went down to the river and washed my face and hands, and then I opened up my pork and beans and ate them with some crackers and washed it down with soda pop, and it was a feast fit for a king.

In that one day I learned a lot about how to get something to eat without stealing or begging for it. I couldn't beg; I've never been able to bring myself to do that. Too much pride, I guess. But I learned that you could get quite a bit of food for just a modest amount of money, like a half a dollar, or you could perform some kind of service and get food without money, and then, I had my guitar, too.

I guess this was really where I started getting into country music, although I didn't realize it at the time. I was just trying to get enough food in my mouth to keep going. But I had my guitar, and down through these little old towns in Alabama they had these places that served illegal liquor. They weren't really bars. Roadhouses, I guess would be what you would call them. Anyway, the people who came there to drink and socialize liked to hear somebody play

the guitar and sing. I didn't claim to be the best in the world at either one, but I was hungry.

I learned a new trick in these places. The only money you could make entertaining there was in tips. People would get to feeling pretty good after a few drinks and throw a few coins up there. Sometimes it would be a long time before anyone would throw the first nickel or dime. After that, it was okay because they sort of followed the leader, but I came up with this idea of using a shill. A shill in that business is somebody who helps you get the tips started. What I would do would be to get some guy and give him a dime and ask him to throw it out on the floor after I had done my first song. That way, it would give the other people the idea that they were supposed to tip me for what I was doing.

Well, the first time I pulled that trick it almost didn't come off. What happened was, the shill threw the dime after my first song all right, but it landed right in the middle of a little rug they had out on the floor. Of course, the idea is that when the coin hits it makes a clinking sound, and everybody realizes that somebody has thrown a tip. But this one landed on the rug, and nobody ever heard it!

I knew I had to think of something quick. It was like that time at Mohawk School when Paul Raider and I were fighting, and we made it look like we were dancing when the principal came up. So I jumped up and said, "Oh, looky here. Somebody threw me a dime. Ten cents. Gollee! Thank you very much." Then I went back and sat down and started playing again. The next day I told that guy, "Don't throw it near that rug. Throw it out on the floor and let it roll. I want them to hear it."

That's how I made my living for a while. I'd go from one roadhouse to the other, playing and singing for tips. Sometimes I'd make as much as a dollar or two or even three dollars in one night. That was more than my daddy made.

A lot of people didn't want to give me any money, but at the same time they wanted to look like they were tipping me pretty big, so they would throw pennies. That was all right. Five pennies made a nickel, and a nickel would buy a can of pork and beans.

I didn't spend any of that money. I had learned how to get food without it, and I decided I was going to save it. At night I usually slept in haystacks, but I found out that there was another place that was even better—sawmills. They were usually located off the main roads a mile or so, but you could always see the lights. They kept the furnace burning all night to keep the steam up. They would stoke the fire with wood chips and shavings, and it felt good to be next to a fire because it got cold in the night, even during the summer. They always had a guy on guard with a shotgun, but I would just walk right up and start talking to him. I'd tell him who I was and where I came from and ask him if it was all right to come in. I guess those men were pretty lonely out there because they would always ask me to come on in, and I would spend the night there.

I learned a lot about living, and about people, during that summer on the road. I learned that people don't always live up to the ideas we have of them, or fit the patterns that we've been led to believe they should fit.

I had never had much experience around black people up in Bulls Gap. It was an almost solid white community. About the only black man I had ever been around was a big giant of a man they used to call "Bad Eye." I don't think I ever knew what his real name was. It was when I was twelve years old and working as a water boy for a crew that was building a road that ran through Greene County.

Bad Eye was a mule skinner. They used mules on that job because they just didn't have the kind of heavy machinery that they do now. He was the biggest, strongest

man I ever saw. If a wagon got stuck in the mud and the mules couldn't even pull it out, they'd get Bad Eye. He'd get down behind that wagon, stoop over and flex those beautiful, rippling muscles and lift that wagon up enough that the mules could start pulling it out. He was my buddy. But I couldn't understand why he didn't get paid as much as the other mule skinnners and why he had to sleep in a barn instead of having a nice house.

One day I was bringing a bucket of water up for the workers, and I met Bad Eye driving his wagon around a curve on the road. He said, "Mr. Archie, give me a drink of that cool water." And, of course, I did. In the meantime the foreman, who was a little old skinny guy, mean as the dickens, came up around the curve and saw me hand Bad Eye the water. He came up and jerked at him and made him get down out of the wagon, and then he started beating on him. He said, "I'll teach you, you damned nigger." Poor old Bad Eye was pleading with him, "Please don't hit me anymore, Boss Man."

After it was over, the boss told me, "Son, you don't ever let niggers drink before the white folks."

I couldn't understand it. Here I had one dipper and one bucket of water. I'd take it to the white guys first and then to the black guys. Then I would go back and get another bucket and take it to the white guys, but they would be drinking after the blacks anyway. When I got home that night, I asked my mother about it, and she just said, "We have to keep them in their place." I didn't know what their place was, and it always baffled me. And Bad Eye—he had been a good friend of mine before—started avoiding me after that. He would never look at me. If he saw me coming he would turn his head and walk away. He knew that he had sort of been my hero, and he had been embarrassed and humiliated in front of me. He never spoke to me again.

Years later walking along a lonely road in Alabama, I came across a neat little whitewashed house. It was early morning, way out in the country, and I could smell bacon cooking. The way they cooked country bacon in Alabama could just tear your stomach apart. So I casually walked up to the door, and this big old black man came up when I knocked. I had to have some excuse for being there, and so I asked him how far it was to the next town. He told me.

Then I said, "Smells like you're cooking some bacon."

He said, "We've got plenty of it. Would you like to have breakfast with us?"

Now you've got to remember this was Alabama in 1935. I don't know what would have happened if some white people had seen me go in there and eat breakfast with that black family. But on the other hand, it was a long way from anywhere and I was hungry. So I went in and sat down with this black man and his wife and kids, and they laid the finest breakfast I've ever had out in front of me. I've never forgotten those beautiful people and how kind they were, and I sometimes think of them when I hear bigoted and prejudiced people talking down about the blacks. We don't have much of that sort of thing in show business, even in country music where you might expect to find it, and I'm glad of that. We've got enough troubles in this old world without hating people because of the color of their skin.

The Wandering Minstrel

I STAYED in Alabama, hitch-hiking from one place to another, all through that summer and into the early fall. Some of my experiences were good ones, like the breakfast I had with the black family, but there were others that weren't so good. Those were rough times, and I ran into some rough people. I wouldn't care to go back into some of the roadhouses where I played and sang for tips.

One night I was playing at one of those places in a small town (I can't recall the name) when a couple of real plug uglies walked in. I'm sure they were drunk on moonshine whiskey. They didn't say anything, but they looked at me mean as a snake while I was singing, and then they went over and sat in a booth. Pretty soon they started talking real loud and arguing with each other. I stopped singing because they were stealing the show, and anyway I sure didn't want to do anything to upset them. After a while one of them pulled out a gun—it was a German Luger left over from World War I, I guess—and stuck it right between the other guy's eyes and said, "Now, if you open your mouth just one more time I'm going to blow your damn brains out."

Well, they sat there like that for at least five minutes,

one guy holding the gun and the other just frozen stiff with his eyes crossed from looking down that gun barrel. Then suddenly the man with the gun pulled it away and stuck it back down in his belt, and then they both burst out laughing! They thought it was funny as the dickens. I got out of that joint as fast as I could.

I was headed into Montgomery when I ran into another hitchhiker or bum or knight of the open road, and we started talking about our adventures. I told him I had been sleeping in haystacks and sawmills. He said, "You don't have to do that. They have the Transient Bureau now, and there are these places where you can go and get a place to sleep and the government pays for it. They'll even give you something to eat. But there's one catch to it; they'll make you take a bath. Before you do anything else, they'll give you a piece of soap and a towel and you'll have to clean up."

Well, the prospect of having to take a bath wasn't all that unpleasant to me. In fact, I wanted one in the worst way. My mother had always told us kids, "You may be ragged and your clothes may be patched, but by golly you're always going to be clean." I had been bathing as good as I could in creeks and places like that, but I needed me a good old thorough soaking. So this fellow and I went to the Transient Bureau place there in Montgomery and registered and got our soap and towels and took a bath. I felt a lot better, but I don't know about my friend.

They gave us supper, and it was a pretty good one, too, and then took us into the sleeping quarters. It was like a big old warehouse with just row after row of white bunks, double deckers, as far as you could see. The place was almost full. There were a lot of people on the move then. I guess that that part of our country's history is sort of colorful now, looking back at it over the years, but, brother, I want to tell you that it wasn't too colorful when you were

living through it. Those people in that place in Montgomery that night were somber and sullen and bitter. You didn't see a smile on anybody's face.

After we went to bed, the guy on the top bunk next to mine started groaning. I could tell he was in real pain, but the man sleeping under him was one of these real hard cases, and he kept saying, "Shut up. Shut your damn mouth so we can get some sleep!"

Other people were saying, "Let him alone, there's something wrong with him." But then this tough guy on the lower bunk took his foot and kicked the upper bunk as hard as he could, and the poor guy on top fell right out onto the floor. We found out later that he had appendicitis.

After the sick guy fell out of bed, another man close by got his shoe and hit the man on the lower bunk across the head as hard as he could. Then another one hit him, and they started piling onto him, and it was the awfulest fight you ever saw. I grabbed my pack and eased my way down to the other side of the building because I didn't want any part of that action. Then the cops came in—I guess somebody had called them—and they joined in the fight. They finally got order restored and took two or three people off to jail, but I didn't sleep much the rest of the night. That was the first and last night I ever spent in the Transient Bureau's accommodations.

Sometimes you can run into the good side of life and the bad side right in the same little town or on the same street. I remember the little town of Boaz, Alabama, very well because I bumped into the two extremes there. I had hitched a ride and had been let off in Boaz in the afternoon, and I was walking down the main street trying to figure out how to come up with my next meal. A law officer, either a deputy or a constable, came up and asked me my name and where I was from, and I told him. He said, "We've had you bums through this town before, and if you ain't out of

town by sunset, I'm going to take this gun and shoot you. I shot a nigger off the train just last night."

I said, "Yes, sir." There wasn't much else I could say.

But then a man who was sitting on the porch of a house across the street waved to me to come over. I did, and he asked me to sit down with him and his family. His wife and grown daughter were there. We talked for a while, and he wanted to know all about me. It turned out that he was a preacher.

He said, "That man you were talking to will do just exactly what he says. He won't hesitate to shoot. He's a bad one, but he's the law here, and there's not much we can do about him."

Then he asked me if I would stay and have supper with them. Well, I was getting pretty hungry and I said I would, but I was keeping one eye on the sun because I didn't want it to go down before I got out of town. Then these nice people asked me to stay all night with them; so I didn't have to worry about the deputy anymore. I got to sleep in a nice, clean bed with sheets and pillows and all the trimmings. But, you know, I wasn't comfortable in that bed. I guess I'd been sleeping in haystacks and sawmills too long.

I didn't want the family to worry about fixing me breakfast in the morning, and I got up at about 5:00 A.M. and slipped out before they were awake. I walked out the highway about two miles and then this car pulled up and stopped. It was the daughter of the family I had just left.

"Why did you just take off without saying anything?" she asked me. "You know that we wanted you to stay for breakfast."

So I went back with her and they fed me a fine breakfast, and she took me back out to the highway. I exchanged letters with those great people for a long time after that. I guess they were about as good as anybody I

ever met, and I'm sure that that deputy was as bad a person as I've ever run across.

I had been hitchhiking everywhere that I went, but one day I ran into this guy who was an old pro at bumming around, and he told me I was crazy to travel that way. "That's not the way to go," he said. "The way to go is on freight trains. All you have to do is learn how to stay away from the railroad dicks and you won't have any trouble."

So I became a hobo for a short time. I traveled around by freight trains for a few weeks, and I was lucky. I learned the railroad detectives' routines, and I never got caught. By now it was late October and it was getting cold. I felt as if I had had enough bumming around. It was time to get back to Tennessee and get on with my life.

I bumped into that same guy again, and now he had changed his tune. "Freight trains won't get it," he said. "What you want to do is to ride on passenger trains. It's simple, and I'll show you where to ride, and if you're smart you won't get caught."

Those of you who remember the days of passenger trains will recall that there were connecting passages between the cars, and there was a connecting booth between the engine and the first car that was called the "blind." This guy taught me to ride in the blind. You were closed up in there, and nobody looked in while the train was moving. So I rode the blind from Alabama back to Knoxville. I learned how to avoid the railroad dicks at the stops. What happened, when the train would stop, all the other guys in the blind would run and try to hide somewhere where the dicks couldn't find them. But that's what the dicks expected them to do, and they started catching them. I learned that if you stayed right in the blind, you were safe. So I just stayed there through every stop, and it turned out that I almost outsmarted myself.

When we pulled into Knoxville at the old Southern Railway station, I stayed in the blind while the others ran. Then, all of a sudden, I heard this hammering and scraping right under my feet, and the first thing I knew the engine had pulled away and left me right there in the middle of the tracks. I looked up the tracks and here were two guys, and one of them pointed at me and started toward me. I didn't know whether they were railroad dicks or not, and I didn't wait to find out—I took off. I ran; I jumped over tracks, and I hid behind box cars, and finally I came out right on Gay Street, the main drag of Knoxville. I was dirty and sweaty, and I know I looked like a bum, which I guess I was, and I needed a place to wash up. So I ducked into the first open building that I came to, and it turned out to be the Veteran of Foreign Wars dance hall. Somehow, fate was playing a part in my life, because it turned out that that was where I got my first job in Knoxville.

Hard Times

THERE was only one person in the VFW dance hall when I walked in and asked if he had a place I could wash up. It turned out that he was the manager. He showed me to a wash basin, and I laid my knapsack down and unstrung the guitar from around my neck and laid it down.

"Can you play that thing?" he said.

"I sure can," I said, "and I can sing, too."

"We just might have a spot of work for you," he said.

"We have dances here two nights a week, Wednesday and Saturday, and our members like to have live bands play for them. Now, if you could find a couple of guys to play with you, we might work something out."

"Mister," I said, "I'll guarantee you that I'll find somebody."

So I hustled and rounded up three musicians—a saxophone player, a bass player and a piano player—and came back in a couple of days. He hired us, and we got two dollars a night apiece, which meant that I was making four dollars a week. I got myself a room in one of the Lay Houses, which were boarding houses run by the Lay fam-

ily, for three dollars a week room and board, and lived off that other dollar.

Well, things went along pretty good for a while. We played and the people came and seemed to enjoy us, and business picked up. There was one awkward thing that happened there I still remember to this day. This big, heavy fellow, who must have weighed 250 pounds, kept coming in there with a good-looking girl. I guess it was his wife, but I never did really know. They were both friendly to me, and I used to kid around with them. The girl would kind of flirt with me, I guess, but I was pretty innocent about women, then, and I sure didn't do anything to encourage it.

One night they came in and the big guy said, "Arch, come outside with me. I want to talk to you." We went back in a little alley behind the place, and before I realized what was happened, he pulled out a pistol and pointed it right at my head.

"You've been playing around with my woman, and it's ruining my whole life," he said, and then he started crying. It's tough to see a man that big crying, but it's a heck of a lot tougher when he's got a gun pointed at your head.

Once again in my life I had to do some fast thinking. I really was innocent, and I turned it on. I told him, "I've been friendly with her and I've been friendly with you, too, because I liked you and I thought you both liked me. But I've never done a single thing with her, ever."

He put his gun down and my heart went back down out of my throat. "I believe you," he said. "It's not your fault. It's the goddam woman. She's just like all these damned women. You can't trust 'em."

He went back inside the dance hall and walked over to the table where she was sitting. He yanked her up and starting knocking her around something fearful, turning

over chairs and busting everything in sight. Then he dragged her out of the place. I used to see him around town some after that, but I never saw her again. I don't know whether they were already married or if they got married after that or much of anything about them. But I sure was relieved when they went out that door.

I was in show business now, and I learned a very quick lesson on how you can get cut up in it. I'm not saying that it's all that different from any other business. I guess there are people who will cut your throat in all of them. But here's what happened to me at the VFW dance hall.

I went in one Wednesday night for the regular show. The other band boys were there, and I noticed that they didn't greet me when I came in, but I didn't think anything about it. Then the manager called me over and said, "Archie, I'm sorry about this. You've done good here and business is good, but we're going to have to let you go."

I said, "I don't understand. I thought things were going just great."

He said, "They are, but I'm still going to have to let you go."

"What about the other boys in the band?" I asked. "Have you told them yet?"

"I don't have to tell them," he said. "They're staying. You're the only one that's leaving. The rest of the band wanted it that way. It was their idea."

I couldn't believe it. My own band was firing me. I had put the show together and we even called ourselves "Archie Campbell's Troubadors." I asked the three band members about it. A couple of them talked to me, even though they were sort of embarrassed about it. The other one didn't say a word.

One of them said, "It's this way, Arch. We're making eight dollars a night for the four of us, and we don't really need your guitar playing. We figure that will be two dollars

more a night for the three of us to split up, and we need the money."

"I need the money, too, and it's my band. I hired you," I said.

"We're sorry about it, Arch, we really are," said the second guy. "But this is how it has to be."

Well, there I was in Knoxville in the dead of winter without a job, fired by my own band. I didn't know which way to turn. I tried answering ads in the newspapers, but the only place that gave me any sort of a chance was Knox Dry Goods, a department store. They put me on as a door-to-door salesman, but I didn't get any salary. Everything was to be on commission. If I sold a refrigerator or stove or some sort of appliance like that, I was to get a certain percentage of the sale as a commission.

For two weeks I walked my feet off all over Knoxville, trying to peddle those appliances. Times were hard, of course, and selling wasn't easy. I did manage to close four or five sales, but the credit man at the store turned every single one of them down because he said the people didn't have good credit standings. So I finally had to give that up.

Months later I learned that this man, the guy in the credit office, was turning down almost all the sales that the door-to-door salesmen would make. Then, of course, the salesmen would get discouraged after a while and quit. Then the credit man would go to these people and close the sale himself and get the commissions! I heard that three or four of the salesmen that he had pulled that trick on later got him out somewhere and just beat him about half to death. I wasn't in on that, but I sure could sympathize with them. I guess that just goes to show, like I said earlier, that there are some people who will cut you up in just about every kind of business.

This was January of 1936. I had to leave the Lay House

because I just couldn't pay my bill and had no prospects of ever being able to pay it. Mrs. Lay, who was one of the sweetest ladies I ever knew, cried when she told me that she couldn't carry me any longer. I told her I understood.

So now I was not only without a job, I was also without a place to live. At nights I used to go sleep on the benches in the bus terminal which was located on Gay Street back then. I had to learn the routine of the cop on the beat, because he would come in at certain times and run the people out who didn't have bus tickets. A friend named Charlie Pickle really saved my life during this period. Charlie was a singer and a radio man, and he would take me home with him almost every day for a square meal. His mother would fix up a big batch of cornbread and pinto beans, and I would eat like a hog because that would be the only meal I would get that day. I couldn't have made it without Charlie and his mother's pinto beans through those weeks.

Now I had arrived at the darkest, coldest, loneliest day of my life. It was a day that changed the course of my life, when the fates seem to take a hand in pointing out the path that I would follow. Even now, forty-four years later, I shudder to think what could have happened to me if I had carried out my plans that day. I never have told this story before.

On the coldest day of that winter (I remember that the temperature was eight above zero) I missed connections with Charlie Pickle, and I didn't have anything to eat all day. When I went to the bus station that night, I had a definite plan in mind of how I was going to get some food. There was a delicatessen down on Central Avenue about a block away, that had hams and big bologna sausages and all sorts of delicacies hanging out in the shop window. It was closed at night, and sometime after midnight I was going to go down there, bust that window open, and rob

that place! Not for money, you understand. I was going to get me something to eat.

I sat down on a bench in the bus station, intending to get up and move out of sight when the policeman made his rounds at about 11:00 P.M. But I was tired and weak from the lack of food, and I guess I sort of half passed out. Anyway, I woke up suddenly to find the cop tapping me on the foot with his nightstick.

"Do you have a bus ticket, son?" he asked.

I told him "No."

"Well, you'll have to move along," he said.

Like I said, the temperature was eight degrees. I didn't have a topcoat. The suit I wore was so threadbare that you could see the skin through it at the knees when I bent my legs. My shoes were lined with cardboard. I had to go out into the night, and with the cop prowling the beat, I couldn't go through with my plan to rob the delicatessen window.

There was a restaurant on Market Street a short distance away that was called the Gold Sun. I had been there a few times, and I knew that it stayed open all night. When the cop ran me out of the bus terminal, I ran as hard as I could to the Gold Sun, figuring that I could at least stay in there a few minutes and get warm.

The only person in the place was the man behind the counter, a Greek fellow whose name, I learned later, was Nick. I went in and stood by one of the radiators. After I stood there for a few minutes, he came over and wanted to know what I was doing. I told him that I had forgotten my topcoat and that I had just stopped in to get warm.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

I pulled a name out of the top of my head, the Watauga Apartments. It was nearby.

He then asked, "What number is your apartment?"

"Number One," I said. I guess I wasn't in a very imaginative frame of mind.

"Well, you just go over and sit down in a booth and get warm," he said.

I did, and I went to sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but after a while I woke up, and Nick was setting a big breakfast in front of me—ham and eggs, biscuits, gravy, coffee, the works. I almost cried.

"Buddy," I said, "if my life depended on it, I couldn't give you a nickel for this meal."

"I didn't figure you could," he said. "You don't live at the Watauga Apartments, either, because that's where I live. I'll bet you don't own a topcoat. You're just a kid who is down and out. Now you eat that and then rest some more, and I'll wake you up when it's time for the breakfast crowd to start coming in."

So I ate and slept, and Nick came over and shook me awake at about six o'clock in the morning and told me I would have to leave. But the worst of it was over. I was ready to go out in the cold, ready to face the bus terminal again, ready to face whatever there was ahead for me. I never forgot Nick or the Gold Sun. For years, as long as it was there, I would go by and have a meal every once in a while.

I have often wondered what course my life would have taken if things had gone differently that night. What if I had not gone to sleep in the bus terminal, and the cop had not run me out? What if I hadn't stumbled into the Gold Sun and if Nick had not been there with his warm heart? What if I had gone on with my plan to rob the delicatessen? Heaven knows what would have happened to me. I'm sure I would have been caught; for one thing, I had never stolen anything in my life and still haven't, thank God. I would have been a rank amateur. I'm sure I would

have looked guilty just walking along the street. I know I would have felt guilty.

Years later, when I was on the Knox County School Board, sometimes kids would come before us in trouble for doing things like that, and I would always be as lenient as I could with them. Because I knew what a thin line separates the people who go straight from those who get off the path. I knew that in certain circumstances it could happen to just about anybody. It almost happened to me. What is it that they say? There, but for the grace of God, go I.

The Midday Merry-Go-Round

My luck had turned now. The day after I had spent the night at the Gold Sun cafe I ran into Charlie Pickle again, and he took me home for a big meal. While we were eating, he asked me. "Have you heard about the change at WNOX? They've hired a new general manager."

I had been haunting WNOX for weeks, trying to get an audition. By this time I had pretty well settled on entertaining as a profession. I had learned during my summer tour that I wasn't going to be able to make a living by selling my paintings. But the previous manager at that radio station, a man named Frazier, didn't think too highly of me. He finally got to the point where he told me, "Get out and stay out. I'm tired of looking at your face!"

The new manager's name was John Mayo, and he was from New York. Well, I didn't think that a hillbilly singer had a chance of getting a job from a New York city man, but I was going to try anyway. I figured I'd jazz up my act a little bit for him. So I took my guitar and set out for the Andrew Johnson Hotel where the WNOX studios were located then.

I was surprised when I got in to see Mayo rather easily. I told him I wanted to try out, and he asked me to sing

some numbers for him. He went in the sound room and I stayed in the studio, and he gave me the signal to start. I figured he wouldn't like the country music, or "hillbilly" music, as we called it then, so I opened up with "I'm in the Mood for Love," a Bing Crosby favorite of the day. Then I did "Stardust," and then a couple of other songs from the popular sheets.

He would say, "Sing another one," and after a while I got the idea that he was sort of laughing at me. You know, here's this country boy trying to sing popular songs.

So finally, when I figured the audition was about to end, I decided to throw some real country at him. I thought, "Well, this is my last chance, and I'm not going to make it anyway. He thinks I'm just a country hick, and so by God I'll give him something that's really country to remember me by."

So I banged a couple of mournful chords on that guitar and tore into the oldest, countriest song I knew, "Maple on the Hill." Now, anybody who has ever listened to country music has heard "Maple on the Hill." . . . "Near a quiet and country village stood a maple on the hill, where I walked with my Geneva long ago." I made it even country-er than it was.

After that was over, Mayo came back into the studio and he asked, "How many songs like that last one do you know?"

I told him probably a thousand.

He said, "Listen. Bing Crosby sings 'I'm in the Mood for Love' and he does it pretty well, too. We'll leave that up to him. But I've got the idea that there a lot of people here in East Tennessee who would like to hear songs like that last one. That's the music they grew up with. I've got a fifteen-minute slot every afternoon, 5:15 to 5:30, and I'm going to give you a shot at it if you'll sing that kind of song."

I felt like bursting into another song.

"I'm not sure how much I can pay you," he said.

"I don't even care," I said. "Just put me on the air and pay me what you want to."

It turned out that my pay was seven dollars a week. That may sound like peanuts now, but, brother, it was all the wealth in the world to a poor old country boy who had been starving to death in the city back in 1936. I called Mrs. Lay at the boarding house and told her I had a job and asked her if I could get my room back.

She started crying. She said, "Archie, I've just been praying that you would find something. Why don't you come on back right now, and we'll fix you a big meal."

I lived good off that seven dollars a week. I had four dollars left after I paid Mrs. Lay three for the room and board. The show went well. I started getting some cards and letters from listeners. After a few weeks, John Mayo told me I was getting a raise. And I did, from seven dollars to seven and a half. But what the heck. It was a raise, and I was happy about it. Now I felt as though I had a future in front of me.

For a change, after all that had happened to me, things went well in the life of Archie Campbell. I was on the radio every weekday afternoon, and on Saturdays at noon the station had what was called the "Farm and Home Hour." The entertainers around town would appear on that show for no pay. What we got was some exposure to the public—and free tickets to the Roxy Theater, the only burlesque theater in town, where the girls gave the public a lot of exposure. I always enjoyed the shows there, even the parts where the girls still had their clothes on. There were some great comics on the burlesque circuit then, and the one at the Roxy, Cotton "Webfoot" Watts, was one of the greatest. I learned some tricks about timing and second takes that helped me a great deal after I was launched into comedy.



My first radio band. I'm holding the guitar; that's Hebron Jones in the center and Paul Barlow on the right.

It was while I was doing the "Farm and Home Hour" that I first ran into a fiddle player named Roy Acuff. Roy was an old Union County boy who had moved to Knoxville and had played football for Central High School. He had his own band, and he was the leader of it. Anything Roy was around, he was the leader because he was just born to lead. Before I go any farther let me say this about Roy Acuff. He's the straightest, most honest man I've ever known. I'd rather have Roy Acuff's word than a written contract any time. He's a great man, a humanitarian who has helped more people than I could begin to name, and there's just nobody in this business that I think more of than Roy. To me, he is Mr. Country Music.

But I'll tell you something else about Roy. He was tough

in those days and maybe a little mean, too, and you didn't want to mess around with him. He and a friend of his used to sort of prowl the night spots on Saturday nights, and when somebody gave them trouble, they would just flat clean out an area. Roy once told me that if I ever had a fight to make sure I got in the first lick. "Hit him about five times before he knows what's happening," he said. "Then the fight will be over before he realizes that it ever started."

Roy was on the "Farm and Home Hour" with his band, the Crazy Tennesseans, and I joined them. I was the only singer on the show; the rest were instrumentalists. They were good musicians, and, of course, Roy had this great leadership quality, and pretty soon the "Farm and Home Hour" became so popular that WNOX started putting it on the air every day at noon.

Along about this time, February of 1936, WNOX brought in another new staff member, and once again the course of my career changed. His name was Lowell Blanchard, and he was young like me, just fresh out of the University of Illinois. Lowell was a great, great talent in radio in those days. He had this knack of seeming to know just what the radio audience wanted. He had a bubbling, happy personality, so that everybody just loved to listen to him, and they all felt like they knew him.

Lowell took over as master of ceremonies on the "Farm and Home Hour" and renamed it "The Midday Merry-Go-Round." He had fresh new ideas. He wanted to bring in some comedy along with the country music, and he searched through the whole cast for a comedian—all except me. He even tried Roy, but Roy will be the first to tell you that he wasn't cut out to be a comic. Finally, I went to Lowell and said, "My feelings are hurt. You've asked everybody except me to try out for the comedy role." So he said he would give me a crack at it.

The next day on the show I came out dressed up like an old, old man. An old country man, with a white beard and spectacles and suspenders. I didn't have any script prepared or any jokes ready to tell. I just talked with Lowell and told him all about my troubles and my rheumatism and so forth. Lowell would play right up to me. He had that great gift of being able to lead a comic into the right situations—the perfect straight man.

That's how old "Grandpappy" was born. I don't think anything ever hit radio in Knoxville the way the "Midday Merry-Go-Round" and that character did. It was an overnight success. No, not an overnight success—an overnight sensation. We started getting mail from everywhere, and gifts. A lady from Maryville—I still remember her name to this day; it was Mrs. Franks—sent me a fancy pillow that she had sewed for me, and we talked about it on the air. The first thing you know, old Grandpappy was getting gifts from all over. After we moved into the Market House theater to accommodate the live audience, we had a table out in front of the stage where people could bring their gifts and leave them.

The town had never seen anything like it. At twelve noon every day Lowell would walk up to the mike with those words that I can still hear now: "The Midday Merry-Go-Round is on the air!" and the other station in Knoxville just might as well have closed down its operation for an hour and a half. When it came time for my skit, they'd play a parody of "The Old Gray Mare" in the background and the rest of the cast would sing: "The Old Gray Man, he ain't what he used to be, he ain't what he used to be, he ain't what he used to be, singing on the radio!" Then Lowell and I would go through this dialogue that we had prepared, mostly from memory rather than written script, and the audience would just eat it up.

We had such success that we had to move the show

twice in the space of a few weeks to take care of the people who wanted to see it done live. At first it was a studio production at the station, but then we moved it into the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* building, where we used an old boxing ring as the stage. We outgrew that in a hurry and moved into the old Market House, where we could take care of maybe two or three hundred fans. We were sitting on top of the world.

Those early days on the "Merry-Go-Round" was one of the happiest times of my life. I found myself a local celebrity in my early twenties, and that was pretty strong stuff for a country boy from Bulls Gap. There's no question about it, being in the limelight helps you with the women, and I'll guarantee you that I took advantage of that. Like I said before, I've always liked the women, and thank heavens some of them have liked me. So I did a lot of tomcatting around in those days, and maybe I shouldn't admit it, but I didn't slow up too much as the years went by.

Lowell and I had a wonderful time back then. We were not only professional associates but very close friends, and we used to do some things that other people couldn't have gotten by with. I remember one time when Lowell and I decided to challenge a silly law they had on the books of the city of Knoxville. It said that you couldn't sing the song, "Ta Ra Ra Boomdiay" on the city streets. Well, we decided we would sing it right out in public on Gay Street, and we had it fixed up with the policeman on the downtown beat, Officer Hockenjos, that he would arrest us and charge us. It was partly a publicity stunt and partly just pure devilment. We figured the newspapers would play it up big, and they did.

So we got out in front of the Strand Theater one afternoon and started singing that song as loud as we could. I was in my Grandpappy outfit, and just about everybody knew us. Officer Hockenjos, following the script, came up



Backstage at the "Midday Merry-Go-Round" in the 1940s. Left to right: Lowell Blanchard, "Grandpappy," and Carl Story.

and warned us and then left. We went on singing. He came back and warned us again and said, "Now, if I have to come back, I'm going to take you to the police station." Of course, we started right up again, louder than ever, and he came back with a paddy wagon.

He grabbed me by the seat of my old baggy trousers and started pulling me across Gay Street to the wagon. All of a sudden I felt something rip. I said, "For God's sake, be a little easier on me. You've just torn the ass end out of my britches!" And he had. He had to find a safety pin to hold my pants up.

Meanwhile, the crowd that had gathered around was just going wild with excitement. You have to remember that I always played my role as Grandpappy, not as Archie Campbell, and a lot of these people thought I was about eighty years old. There was a little old lady there—I'll never forget her—who thought the whole thing was for real. She had an umbrella that she was carrying, and she started beating on Officer Hockenjos with that thing, yelling "Let him alone! He's an old man!"

When we got to City Court, Judge Bob Williams gave us a "trial." Of course, he was in on it, too. He heard all the testimony, and his sentence was that Lowell and I had to sing the song again, this time in court. So we belted it out, and the newspapers took pictures, and then he let us go. It just made the "Merry-Go-Round" more popular than ever.

Officer Hockenjos was a big old jolly guy who knew all the WNOX entertainers, and he was a good friend of mine. I remember another time when he had to investigate one of my escapades, but this one wasn't planned. I chased women something awful, and I used to drive along Gay Street in my car and try to pick them up as they were walking along the sidewalk, if they looked good enough. This one day I was following a real cutie and not paying any attention to where I was driving, and all of a sudden

I rammed right into the back of the car ahead of me. Officer Hockenjos was on the scene, and he checked it out, but there wasn't any damage; so I didn't have to face any charges.

But the funny part about this story is that there was a lady driving the car that I rammed into. She was wearing a fancy hat, and when I struck her car, her hat fell off into the back seat. Now, I won't ever forget this. She reached back into the back seat and got her hat. Then she put it on. Then she adjusted the windshield mirror so that she could look and make sure that her hat was on just right. Then she rolled down the side window and stuck her head out and yelled at me:

"You son of a bitch!" she said.

Ain't that just like a woman?

I have found this out as I have traveled through life. Nothing stays the same. Things are always changing. No sooner had we hit the top in terms of popularity throughout the WNOX listening area than a split began to build up behind the scenes of the "Merry-Go-Round." It wasn't a split among us entertainers as much as it was a disagreement between management and some of the entertainers.

Even though the show had done so well, the entertainers had not been given a raise, and Roy Acuff in particular was teed off about it. Like I said, Roy was a natural leader, and he was looking out for his band members as well as himself. They wouldn't give him any satisfaction about raising the pay scale, so one day after a show at the Market House, Roy walked up to the mike and talked to the audience. He told them things weren't going too well between the station and the musicians and that there would have to be some changes made if they expected the Crazy Tennesseans to stay.

That got things moving upstairs. The front office people didn't want any trouble, so they passed out the word that

they would just as soon Roy would leave. I guess it was sort of mutual because he wanted to branch out and do more personal appearances, and so he made a deal with the rival station, WROL. But before he left, Roy had some things he had to say to the station manager, John Mayo. Now, I've already told about how tough Roy was, and the day he was going to go see Mayo the station had cops guarding every entrance. But Roy had a lot of charm when he wanted to use it, and he talked the cops into letting him in. According to the stories I've heard, he told them, "I'm just going up there and tell this man what a son of a bitch he is." I wasn't at the meeting, but knowing Roy I'd guess that's exactly what he did. Anyway, he left and never came back.

In the meantime WNOX was doing all right with me. I don't claim that it was because I was any great talent or anything like that. It was just that I had created this curiosity, old Grandpappy, and everybody was excited about it. So they raised me to thirty-five dollars a week, which was more money that I ever thought I'd make and more than a lot of pretty high-powered executives in Knoxville were making then. At age twenty-two, old Arch was doing pretty good.

Old Grandpappy Moves Around

THINGS went well on the "Midday Merry-Go-Round." Lowell Blanchard and I wrote our own material, often borrowing old jokes as all comics always have, and we developed a sense of timing and a "feel" of working together. We did broad, simple comedy, aimed at a listening audience that was made up largely of country people and working people. I'm sure that some would have called our routines corny, and they were. But they were also funny. Let me give you a sample of one skit:

Grandpappy: "I've got me a new billy goat."

Lowell: "Where do you keep him?"

Grandpappy: "In the house."

Lowell: "What about the smell?"

Grandpappy: "He'll just have to get used to it like the rest of us."

Almost all jokes have variations. Here's a spinoff of that same routine:

Grandpappy: "My billy goat got his nose cut off."

Lowell: "How does he smell?"

Grandpappy: "Terrible."

Working with Lowell sure made it a lot easier for me. He had that great natural instinct for milking the last laugh out

of every situation. He kept me on my toes. Sometimes he would trick me and feed me the wrong line just to see how I would react, and I would do the same to him. We were both very young in the business, but working with each other and bouncing ideas off each other, we quickly became professionals in the young art of radio comedy.

Lowell introduced me to golf which became one of the great loves of my life. One day in 1936 he took me out to Holston Hills Country Club for a round. I had no idea of what the game was all about, and my score for the eighteen holes proved it. I shot 128. But I fell in love with the game, and it wasn't too long before I was playing pretty doggoned good. I've had some fine rounds over the years, down in the high sixties and low seventies, and I've played in a lot of tournaments and done pretty well in some of them. But the greatest thing that golf has brought to me has been the companionship of some wonderful friends. I wouldn't take anything for the thousands of hours I've spent on the golf course, and I've been a member of Holston Hills throughout most of the years since I first took up the game.

Lowell also introduced me to something else—my first wife. One day in 1937 he brought a pretty little dark-haired girl from Birmingham named Charlene Carney up to the "Merry-Go-Round" set. I struck it off with her right away, and we started dating. Before long, we had taken the big step, and it was a step I wasn't ready to take. It lasted almost five years; we were married in 1937 and divorced in 1941. If someone has to be blamed when a marriage breaks up, I'd have to say that I was the one to blame in this one. I was wild and irresponsible and in a business where a lot of temptation was set in front of me, and I was awfully easily tempted. I chased too many women and raised too much hell, and we wound up doing a lot of fussing and



Practicing my swing at the Whittle Springs Golf Club in Knoxville in the 1940s.

fighting. Years later, I told her I didn't understand how she put up with me as long as she did.

I said something earlier about things never staying the same. Well, they didn't stay the same at the "Merry-Go-Round." Not that there was anything wrong with the show or with the station. It was just that I got a little too big for my britches. I was doing great there and making decent money, but I had this idea that I could get out on my own and go somewhere else and do better. So when a chance came along to start my own show in Bristol at station WOPI, I gathered up a crew of musicians and headed that way. I had Tony Musco, the accordion player who is still one of the best friends I've ever had, bass player Achie Burns, guitar player Charlie Hagaman, and a young comedy team that you may have heard of—Homer and Jethro.

Everyone makes moves in the entertainment business and not all of them are the right moves, not by a long shot. We made a wrong one when we went to Bristol. Maybe we were ahead of our time or something, but the town just wasn't ready for our kind of entertainment.

We did a little bit of every kind of trick to try and keep going. Tony Musco made friends with a Greek fellow who ran a restaurant, and he would feed us when we were broke, which was most of the time. Of course, we had to have a car to get around and make the few personal appearances that we could get, but we couldn't afford the monthly payments. So we'd make a down payment on one and drive it for a month or so until the first monthly payment came due, and then they would repossess it and we would scrape up another down payment and get another car.

Homer and Jethro were just kids then, about seventeen years old, and they were great kids, too. Homer's real name was Junior Haynes and Jethro was Dude Burns. They were both from south Knox County, and they were

the most devoted friends I've ever seen. I remember that Jethro had a birthday during one of our hard spells in Bristol when we weren't getting very much to eat, and Homer saved up and bought him a hot dog and a coke for his present. Achie Burns, who was Jethro's older brother, jumped all over Jethro about that.

"You've been eating," he said. "I smell hot dog on your breath!"

Well, it became obvious that we couldn't stay in Bristol, so I figured I'd better scout around and find us somewhere else to go. I had heard about the "Noonday Frolics" show at station WDOD in Chattanooga, a real good one-hour live program, and so I took off down there to talk with the station manager, a man named Frank Lane. He wasn't really too sure who I was, and when I asked him for a spot on the show for our troupe, he said they were full up with talent and didn't need anybody else.

Now here's a little story that sort of demonstrates that you can never tell what is going to happen to you. When I went to see Frank Lane for the job interview that day, I parked my car on the street right outside the theater where the show was held. When I got back to it, there was a traffic ticket on the windshield for overparking. Well, I was already upset over not getting the job and the sight of that ticket just made me madder. I knew that I wasn't coming back to Chattanooga anyway, so I just took that ticket and tore it up in little pieces and left them lying down at the base of the parking meter. Then a funny thing happened. Two weeks later, after I had gone back to Bristol, Lane called me and said he had a place for me and my band. The offer was very good; I think the boys got fifteen dollars a week apiece and I got about thirty because I was the star. We accepted it in a hurry.

On the very first day that I worked at the "Noonday Frolics," I parked my car in that same place that I had two

weeks earlier. And when I came out after the show, there was this policeman standing there with the pieces of that torn parking ticket in his hand. He said, "You remember this, don't you?"

"I'm afraid I do," I said. So he took me to the courthouse, and I had to pay a fine and that got me off to a bad start with the police in Chattanooga.

I drove a red Pontiac convertible then, and I'd cruise around town with the top down like I was the biggest dog in the hunt. I guess the cops thought I was a smart aleck, and they were right. Anyway, every time I'd go a little over the speed limit or something, they'd nail me. I was unpopular with them, and they were unpopular with me. But it wasn't really so bad until I decided to liven up the Fourth of July celebration in downtown Chattanooga. I was riding down the main street of town, Market Street, with a friend named Doug Dalton. I made Doug drive because I wanted to shoot some firecrackers; not one at a time like anybody else, but a whole package of them in one big explosion. Doug and I made sure that we had gotten out of the vision of a cop who had been keeping his eye on us, and I lit that little bomb and threw it out of the car. It landed right at the feet of another cop whom we hadn't seen!

To this day I've never seen anybody as mad as that policeman was. He didn't even trust himself to talk to me, he was so mad. He hustled me off the police station, and they finally let me go on my own recognizance, but I had to be in court that following Wednesday to face charges. Well, as it turned out, my landlady, a real sweet lady named Mrs. Burke, was a close friend of the judge. She called him and told him what had happened. He must have asked her what she wanted him to do because I heard her say, "I want you to let him go. He's a very nice young man."

When I got to court, the judge called the case and said,

"I understand you've been shooting firecrackers down on Market Street."

I said yes, I had, but that I hadn't known it was illegal. "I've been living in Knoxville, and it's legal there," I said.

He said, "Well, when you get back up to Knoxville, look up my old friend Judge Bob Williams (the city judge) and give him my regards. And do your firecracker shooting up there from now on. Case dismissed."

The cop who had arrested me was waiting on me when I walked out of court. "Who do you know?" he said. "You had to have somebody fix that for you."

I tried to explain to him that I hadn't thrown the firecrackers at him. "I didn't even see you standing there," I said. "I wouldn't have deliberately thrown them at you or anyone else."

He simmered down a bit and finally walked away. Many years later, I went back to Chattanooga to emcee a big dinner, and the head of the security force for the banquet came up to me and said, "Do you remember me?"

I looked at him closely and said, "I sure as hell do." We had a long talk and a big laugh about those firecrackers.

I was doing pretty well on the "Noonday Frolics," and I still had a big enough following in Knoxville that my fifteen-minute segment of the show was recorded and sent to WNOX where they played it on the "Merry-Go-Round," cutting the regular show fifteen minutes short. It was sponsored by Garrett Snuff, and as far as I know, it was the first little mini-network show in radio in our part of the country. In fact, I sort of commuted between Chattanooga and Knoxville during those years, the late 1930s. I'd work at the "Frolics" for a while and then return to the "Merry-Go-Round." I had a lot of friends in both towns, played golf almost every day the weather was good, and worked with some fine entertainers.

One of the performers on the "Noonday Frolics" was a

sixteen-year-old kid out of Chicago who always wore cowboy hats. He played the guitar and sang on the show, but he had a natural flair for comedy, and he always watched every move I made in my comic routines. His name was George Gobel (we called him Little Georgie Gobel on the show) and he was one nice kid. He's still a very nice man, after all these years.

I guess I've pretty well gotten across the point that I was kind of wild in my Chattanooga days. I did a lot of running around, and I did some drinking, too. The funny thing was, I didn't drink because I enjoyed it; I drank because everybody in my crowd did. It was the thing to do. But every time I drank to any extent, I would always be sick the next morning.

Charlene and I lived in a nice neighborhood on Sunset Circle up on the mountain, and our neighbors and close friends were just about all doctors. If people knew that a doctor drank in those days, it would finish him off, but these guys would drink within our own private little group, and they drank pretty seriously, too. Well, one night three or four of them decided they were going to get me drunk as hell. When I got home from doing a show at about 11:00 P.M., they had the drinks all laid out for me. They kept track of it, and between then and three o'clock in the morning—four hours—I consumed an entire quart of whiskey. I've never been drunker in my life, and I don't guess many people have and lived to tell the story.

I woke up at about nine o'clock the next morning and didn't feel too bad. My wife warned me that I was going to be sick, but I said, "No, I'll be okay." Then I got out of bed, and it hit me. I ran to the bathroom and lost everything and then struggled back to bed.

I lay there for four days, Sunday to Wednesday, seldom moving. I couldn't get up and go to work. I couldn't eat, and I couldn't drink. Finally a friend of mine, an announ-

cer on the WDOD staff, came by. He told me, "You'll never get well until you remove the cause. You've got to get all that poison out of you." Then he poured some Sal Hepatica down me. I threw it back up. He poured some more down, and I was able to keep it. I guess you know how Sal Hepatica works. It doesn't take long. Anyway, after it worked, I started feeling better. By early afternoon my headache was almost gone, and I was able to totter outside and get some fresh air.

It was my first time out in four days. I sat there and listened to the birds singing. I had never paid any attention to them before. I noticed how green the grass was and how blue the sky and how pretty the flowers were. I got to thinking about what I was doing. I thought, "When I drink whiskey, the best I can get out of it is three or four hours of fun, and I can't even remember for sure about that. Then I want to die for the next few days. It ain't worth it. Whiskey is out for me." I haven't had a drink since.

Pudge

I WAS back in Knoxville with the “Merry-Go-Round” when Charlene and I got our divorce in 1941. The “Merry-Go-Round” had continued to prosper under Lowell’s genius, and by now they were performing in the WNOX studio theater on the north end of Gay Street.

A lot of great people came through the cast of that show in those years, and some of them went on to become big names in the business. In fact, the list of the people who worked on the “Merry-Go-Round” could almost read like the Country Music Hall of Fame. I’ve already told you about Roy Acuff. Then there were Homer and Jethro, who had so many smash hits with their comical parodies of popular songs; Don Gibson; Chet Atkins; the Carter Family; Carl Smith; Bill and Cliff Carlisle; Pee Wee King and his Golden West Cowboys (I gave them that name); Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs; Kitty Wells; Bill and Charlie Monroe; and Carl Story and his Rambling Mountaineers.

I remember the first time I met Chet Atkins. Bill Carlisle and I were working together, and we needed a fiddle player. One night Bill showed up with this quiet, skinny seventeen-year-old boy. Chet was shy, and he had a bad case of asthma, but he was a very talented youngster, and

I liked him right off. We paid him three dollars a show, and I took him home to stay with me in my South Knoxville apartment.

To this day Chet claims that I saved his life one day, and I may have. He used to smoke Cubebs to relieve his asthma, and one day he went to sleep on the couch while he was smoking and caught a cushion on fire. I just happened to come in at that time, and I rushed over and slapped his face and woke him up, and we put the fire out. We kept pouring water on the couch cushion, but the darned thing would burst out in flames again after about an hour and by the next morning it had completely burned except for the springs.

The band we had on the "Merry-Go-Round" was called the Dixieland Swingsters, and I'd like to say something nice about them. Those guys were great musicians, and as far as I've been able to find out, they were the first ever to combine country and popular music. The Swingsters were not a country band; they played the popular swing of that time and provided all the background music for the show. They had Jerry Collins on the piano, Larry Downing as guitar player and singer, Dave Durham on the trumpet, Buck Houchins on sax and clarinet, and Hubert Carter on the bass fiddle. The other performers on the "Merry-Go-Round" came and went, but the Swingsters were there all the time, and they were darned good.

I hadn't been divorced very long when I met the beautiful lady who has been the great love of my life all these years. I was having a good time being single again and didn't have the slightest notion of ever taking on another marriage. But then I met Pudge. Her real name is Mary, but nobody ever calls her anything but Pudge. I think her grandfather gave her that nickname when she was a pudgy little girl.

But she sure wasn't pudgy when I met her. The way it



That's Pudge under the sombrero.

happened, there was a Blue Circle restaurant across Gay Street from the WNOX studios, and lot of us used to eat lunch there before the noon show. I was in there one day shortly before show time, and there was a whole bunch of

girls in there who worked around there somewhere close. I noticed this one who had dark skin, dark eyes and hair, and built like you know what. Well, when I saw her I didn't look at the rest of them. I told the friend I was with that I'd have to see her stand up before I could pass on her because I was basically a leg man. So I sat there and waited on her to stand up until I was almost late for the show. But when she did she had beautiful legs to go with the rest of her, and I knew I had to get to know her somehow.

When she left, I asked the boy behind the counter if he knew her and he said no, but that she came in there pretty often. So I told him I would give him five dollars if he would find out her name and where she lived. He said, "For five dollars I'll get her whole family history." When I came back the next day he told me that her name was Mary Lee Lewis and that she lived out in the Powell Community. I kept hanging around there and introduced myself to her, hoping that she would just fall all over me because I was a big radio star. That worked on a lot of girls, but it didn't impress Pudge a bit. In fact, I think the only reason she gave me the time of day was because her mother listened to the "Merry-Go-Round" and thought I was pretty good.

I finally got a date with her to go to a movie, but when I showed up at the theater, she wasn't there. She had stood me up. The next time I saw her was at lunch at the old Three Feathers Cafe, and I said, "Well, it doesn't look like I'm getting anywhere with you. I'm not used to getting stood up, and I'm just wasting my time so I guess you won't see me anymore." And I got up like I was going to leave, hoping all the time that she would stop me.

She said, "You give up pretty easy, don't you?" Well, that was the first halfway encouraging thing she had ever said to me, so I sat back down and asked her if I couldn't

have a date. She asked me to come out to her house on Sunday and have dinner with the family. "My mother's dying to meet you," she said.

So I went, and there were relatives all over the place, and there wasn't any way I could have gotten her off alone even if she had been willing, which she wasn't. But I guess the family sort of put the stamp of approval on me, because we started going together after that. Sometimes she would bring her mother up to see the "Merry-Go-Round." She would just leave her there and not watch the show herself and that bothered me because I wanted her to see how great I was.

I got to going out to Pudge's pretty regularly for Sunday dinner, and when I say dinner, I mean the old East Tennessee usage of the word. Dinner is served a little after twelve noon. The meal that's served at night, that's supper. Anyway, one Sunday after I had been there, I got home and turned the radio on. I guess if I told you it was December 7, 1941, you can guess the rest. That's right. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, which meant that the world was going to change a lot over the next few years for millions of people, and I was one of them.

I volunteered for the navy in October of 1942. I wasn't any kind of hero, but I figured they were going to draft me anyway, and so I would take my pick of the services. I went to San Diego for boot camp, and after I finished my basic training, they sent me to Chicago for radio school. The way that came about, when I filled out the forms, they had civilian occupation listed, and I put down, "Radio." The navy took that to mean that I was some kind of radio technician. When they told me they were shipping me off to radio school, I tried to explain that I just barely knew how to turn a set off and on, but I guess they weren't listening.

Pudge was my girl by then, and she came up to Chicago



Archie Campbell, navy photographer third class.

to visit me. The others guys in our outfit—most of them were Yankees—would get a big kick out of the way she talked when I would bring her to the Rec Hall. Pudge was, and still is, just as country as she can be and makes no bones about it. When she would say something, they would all have her repeat it. Finally she got all flustered and told me she wanted to get out of there. “They’re making fun of me,” she said. I told her that they weren’t really. They just thought the way she talked was cute.

When I got through radio school, I was sent to a base in Miami, and I’ll have to admit that I just didn’t turn out to be much of a radio man at all. We had to take down all



Newlyweds—me and Pudge in 1943.

these messages that came in at about a hundred words a minute, and it seemed like they gave us the same test every day. I didn't like it. I used to doodle on a sketch pad after I had gotten my test work done, and one day the chief in charge of the group caught me in the act. I had drawn some sketches of Donald Duck doing silly things. I thought he was going to blister me a new one, but instead he asked, "Can you do other things like that?" When I said yes, he told me to report to a lieutenant, whose name I have forgotten. It turned out that they were getting a little dos and don'ts book together for the Bureau of Personnel, and they got me to draw sketches for them. Things like having Donald Duck putting his hand on the wrong switch and getting shocked.

In order to make me available to do the sketching, they had to transfer me from the radio outfit to the photography

section and that was all right with me. I didn't know any more about taking pictures than I did operating a radio set but that didn't matter because all I was doing was art work. To protect me from getting transferred they had me assigned to the chaplain's service. They told me the only way I could get transferred out of there would be under special orders from the Bureau of Naval Personnel, naming me specifically. I felt pretty safe about that, since I figured the bureau didn't even know who I was.

So, since it looked as though I was going to be in Miami the rest of the war, I sent Pudge a telegram saying, "Emergency. Come at once." When she got there, I told her I wanted to get married, right then. She wanted to wait a while, but I talked her into it, and so we tied the knot.

Things worked out just great. Pudge got a job making about five times what the navy was paying me, and we were able to rent an apartment off the base. It looked like we were set for the duration.

You can guess what happened next. Sure enough, here came special orders from the Bureau of Personnel transferring me to the Atlantic Fleet Camera Party in Bermuda. Of course, Pudge had to go on back home to Knoxville. There's nothing like a war to break up a honeymoon.

On top of that I had a little problem with my new assignment. It wasn't a problem really. It was a crisis. Here I was, on the books as a navy photographer and about to be assigned to an active photography outfit, and I didn't know beans about how to go about taking a picture. The way I had gotten my photographer's rating, the chief had left the book with all the answers to the test lying out and then left the room. The last thing he said to me was, "Be sure and don't look at the book," which, of course, meant that I was supposed to look at it. Even so, I just barely squeaked by. But now, I was faced with learning how to be a working photographer in about a week's time, and by



On a wartime honeymoon in Miami.

golly I did it. I've found that if you work hard enough at something you can usually manage it.

The Atlantic Fleet Camera Party wasn't the biggest outfit in the navy. It consisted of twenty men, and eighteen of them were from Brooklyn. I picked up a new nickname from those Brooklyn guys. I came in the Rec Hall one day asking if anybody wanted to play ping pong. Something about the way I said "ping pong" in my Southern drawl tickled them, and they started calling me "Ping Pong." That was later shortened, and I was known as "Ping" Campbell the rest of my stay in Bermuda.

The camera party did the photography work for ships on shakedown cruises that were going through their gunnery drills. We'd be on the tug that towed the target, and our photos would give an accurate record of the hits and misses. Those were new ships, just going into commission, and sometimes they weren't really ready for World War II. One time one of them fired at the tow ship instead of the target, and our captain just raised hell. "The target's the one behind!" he yelled when he got hold of the captain of the other ship.

I spent five months in Bermuda and then was shipped off to the Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, working with the camera party there. By now it was 1944, and I spent the rest of my tour of service there. I liked Cuba better than Bermuda; I remember one stretch in Bermuda when it rained for ninety-three consecutive days. They had a golf course at Guantanamo, and I hit it lucky when my commanding officer, a lieutenant named Sam Bailey, turned out to be an avid golfer, too. Sam wasn't the old navy type officer at all; he was just in there for the duration, and he didn't give a damn whether you were an enlisted man or an officer. When he found out I played golf, he used to rig up ways to get me away from the others so we could play a round together. He would come into our quarters and



World War II days in Bermuda. Old Arch is the bathing beauty on the extreme right.

say, "All right, men, I'm looking for a volunteer for special duty. You over there, Campbell, step out here." He would march me out and we'd go play golf. He was a heck of a guy, and after the war was over, he visited me in Knoxville, and we played a few rounds at Holston Hills.

I didn't do a lot of entertaining during my navy days. I still kept a hand in as much as I could by doing a few little shows on the base, but for the most part I was a long way from the world of show business. I found, though, that my old radio character still followed me around. Once when we were doing our camera work on a tug off the Cuban coast, I noticed that the tug's captain kept looking at me. It sort of made me uneasy. But finally he called me up to where he was standing and asked, "Aren't you Grandpappy?" It turned out that he was a drug salesman out of Atlanta who worked the Knoxville territory, and we had met before the war and had a golf game at Holston Hills. He invited me up to his cabin and told me I could just move in and stay with him while we were on the tug.

"That might be kind of embarrassing to you," I said. "What about the rest of the crew?"

"To hell with them," he said. "They don't like me anyway." So I lived in high style in the captain's quarters the rest of the mission.

The war was over in September of 1945, and I hadn't seen Pudge in a long time, so I went to my old buddy, Lieutenant Sam Bailey, and told him I needed to figure out a way to get to Miami where I could meet her. He said, "I think I've got the answer. I'm really supposed to send an officer on this job, but I'll let you handle it instead."

We had this new computer apparatus that had gone bad, and he sent me to Miami to have it fixed. In the meantime, he had managed to send a cable to Pudge in Knoxville, telling her to meet me in Miami at a certain time. I had to wait a solid week to get a flight out of the base; I kept get-



Pudge and me in navy days.

ting bumped by officers with higher priority, but I finally made it. When I took the computer to the place it was to be fixed, I asked the guy there how long it would take. He said he could probably have it ready the next day.

I said, "Hell, no. I haven't seen my wife in over a year. Take longer than that."

He said, "Well, in that case, it will take at least a week."

While we were in Miami, I read in the newspapers about the new point system for discharges and figured I had enough points accumulated to get out. So I put Pudge on a plane to Knoxville, got the computer from the repairman, and hustled back to Guantanamo as fast as I could. Back there, the commanding officer told all of us who were eligible for discharge that we could either fly or take a ship back to the states. All the rest chose to fly, but I took the

ship because I had gone through that priority-bumping ordeal just a couple of weeks earlier. In three days I was in Norfolk getting my discharge, and I was already back in Knoxville before the others got a flight out of Cuba.

Home From the War

I WAS back home, and it was time to become old Grandpappy again. Of course, Grandpappy couldn't just come home quietly like any other ex-service man. Lowell said we had to have a parade. I said, "Look, I'm no hero. I haven't been farther than Bermuda and Cuba."

But he said, "Hell, no. Grandpappy's back from the war, and we want everybody to know it."

So we had this big parade, and, brother, it was a big one! To keep it in the country theme, Lowell had horses and wagons all lined up to cart us down Gay Street. I remember that Bill Carlisle, a great comic they called Hot Shot Elmer, and I rode in the same wagon. We started from across the south end of the Gay Street bridge, and there were people lining the sidewalk on the bridge. When we got to Gay Street, there were people packing the sidewalks and hanging out of office building windows. The newspapers the next day said that it was the biggest parade in Knoxville history with more than 100,000 people watching.

But once the parade and the homecoming were done, I had some serious business in front of me. I had left Knoxville in a big mess financially. My previous marriage

and my own irresponsibility with money had left me owing people all over town. The day I left for the navy there were nine creditors suing me for bad debts. The total wasn't a great amount, but it was a serious situation, and I had only myself to blame. I had never realized the value of money, and to tell the truth I still don't. To me it's just something to spend to get what I want.

But Pudge was different. She knew how to handle money, and she still does it in our home. I guess I'm well off now, but I sure wouldn't have been without her. It would have all been long gone, and I would still be owing people right and left.

Anyway, we sat down and figured out what we owed. We had a thousand dollars that she had saved from working, and we spent that to get me back in business. I bought a car for seven hundred and spent the other three hundred on clothes, because I had to go on the road to do shows and make some money.

Those shows on the road, personal appearances we called them, were what kept an entertainer going in those days. They still do, to a certain extent; although we call them "concerts" instead of "personal appearances" now. I guess it sounds a little more high-toned. We made a certain modest amount of money on the radio show, but the real money had to come from doing live shows at the small towns in east Tennessee and in the mountain country of North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia, where they picked up the "Merry-Go-Round" on the radio. We used to plug them on the program: "Tuesday night we'll be at the courthouse in Oneida, Wednesday at the schoolhouse in Wartburg," and so on.

I'll never forget the first personal appearance that Lowell and I and the "Merry-Go-Round" ever made. It was in 1937, just a few months after we had started the show. Roy Acuff sort of set the trend; when he left WNOX for WROL,



Old Grandpappy (top), mule (bottom) in a publicity stunt in downtown Knoxville in 1946.

he started doing these concerts in all the small towns, and we heard that he was raking in the money. So we wanted to get in on it, but we didn't know exactly how to go about it.

But we had a fellow at WNOX who did know something about it. His name was Joe Eppstein, and he was the sports announcer there. They called him "Rapid-Fire" Joe Eppstein because he talked so fast. If there was money connected with any kind of undertaking, Joe could figure out how to get at it. So Lowell and I told him about our problem, and the first thing you know he had us lined up for a Saturday appearance at the Park Theater in Maryville, about twelve miles from Knoxville. Joe told us we would split the money half and half with the theater operator and then pay him (Joe) fifteen percent for doing the booking. Lowell and I jumped up and down at that news.

The first show was at 9:00 A.M., and at 8:30 they were lined up outside the theater for a full block, waiting to get tickets. Remember, this was in the early days of the "Merry-Go-Round," when we were red hot. We would do an hour's show, and then the movie would come on, and then we'd come back and do another hour's show. We did that all day and all night until 11:00 P.M., and when it was over we split up the money and all fourteen of us on the show had earned ninety dollars apiece.

Ninety dollars! You probably can't get the effect of that now. But in 1937 it was a fortune. I had never seen that much money. After I got paid off (they did everything in cash then), I went home and couldn't get to sleep for worrying about something happening to it. I kept it under my pillow.

That next Monday I went down to Kerr Motor Company and made a down payment on a used Chrysler. Then I went out and bought myself a new coat and pants and shoes, and I still had twenty dollars cash left over. I got in

my new used car and took off for Bulls Gap. Now, in 1937, I had never driven a car on the road in my life. All the training I had had was in a parking lot, backing it up and changing gears and so forth. But I got that beauty out on the road to Bulls Gap, and I made it somehow. I weaved all over the road from one side to the other, and it's a wonder I didn't get killed or kill somebody else. But I just had to get up there and tell everybody how rich I was.

Getting back to my money troubles after the war, the law said that a returning serviceman couldn't be garnisheed for old debts for a full year. So I worked every wide place in the road in the WNOX territory, and gradually we paid those debts off. At the end of the year I only had one bill left to pay, a forty-dollar bill for gas at a service station. Wouldn't you know it? Exactly a year to the day after my discharge, the man who owned that station garnisheed my paycheck at WNOX.

I told our station manager not to take it out of my wages, that I wanted to go pay it myself. So I went out to the station and offered the man the money, and he cussed me up one side and down the other. A few years earlier, I wouldn't have been able to stand there and take it, but now I did. I guess those years in the navy helped me to mature a little bit. After he finished cussing me, he did accept the money, so I never did have to have my pay garnisheed. I paid every cent off, and I didn't have to claim bankruptcy or cut any kind of corners. I'm not proud of getting into that mess, but I am proud of the way Pudge and I worked to get out of it.

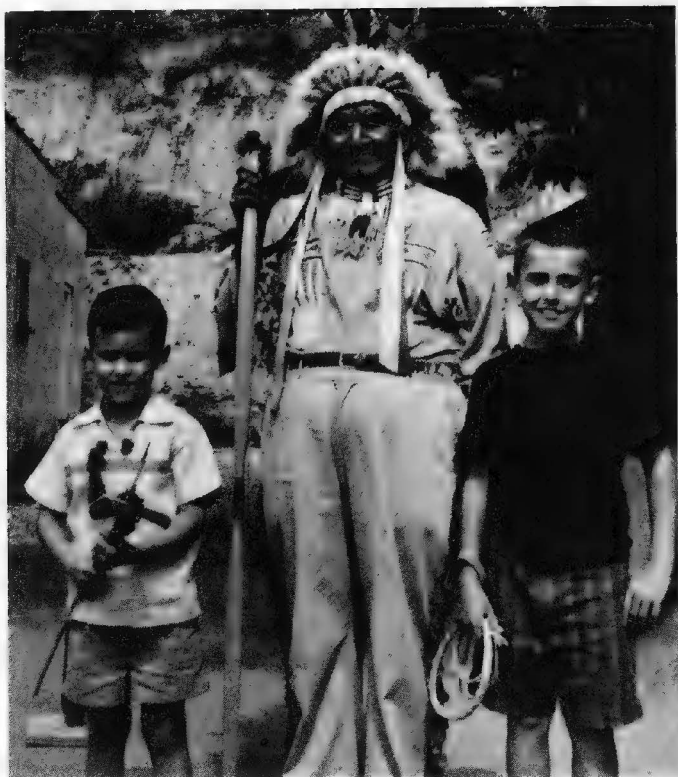
But even after the debts were paid off, our credit status was still bad, and we had to pay cash for everything we bought. That was a very unpleasant experience, especially for Pudge. You know women like to shop around and charge things. Then, too, we wanted to build our own home. We were living at the Whittle Springs Hotel then for

seven dollars a day, and we figured we could build our own place and pay less than that. We needed the extra space, also. Pudge was pregnant by this time; I had told her I was going to get her in a family way the first month I was back from the service, and old Arch was a man of his word. Our first son, Steve, was born in 1946, and then Phil came along five years later to balance the family out. Since I've brought them up, I'll just go ahead and say that I don't guess any father has ever been prouder of his sons than I am. I wanted children very badly, and both of the boys are a part of me and very much like me in different ways.

Steve is an artist and a good one, and he also has a sound business head on his shoulders. Maybe he gets that from his mother. He runs my office in Nashville and does it far better than I could. Phil has that show business streak in him and, like me, he's always wanting to get out and do new things. He has developed into a very professional entertainer, and he headed up our shows in Gatlinburg in the summer months for several years.

Back to the story about trying to build a new home. Because our credit status was bad, I couldn't get a loan from the banks I went to, even a GI loan. I hate to say it, but some of those people seemed to get a kick out of being able to turn us down. I was getting pretty desperate, when I finally heard about an old banker named Matt Kirby on Market Street. He was a friend of Pudge's mother, and he didn't operate his business like most bankers do. On Saturday mornings he would set up a table in the lobby of the bank building and do his business there, handing out loans in cash money from his own pockets. I went to see him and explained my situation, taking pains to drop the name of my mother-in-law, Louise Lewis.

"Those are good folks," he said. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, young man. I'm going to let you have the



Phil (left) and Steve (right) and friend at Cherokee Indian Village in mid- 1950s.

money to build your house, and I don't have any doubt at all that you're going to pay me back." He reached down in one pocket and pulled out some hundred dollar bills, and then dipped in another one for some fifties, and finally into another one for some twenties. I had asked for three thousand dollars, but he let me have thirty-five hundred. "It will take more than you think it will," he said.

That old banker is long gone now, but I haven't forgotten him. It's people like that who make the way a little

smoother in this old world. A funny thing is, as you grow older, you learn to forgive and forget, also. A few years later, I ran into the service station owner who had cussed me out. I was visiting the Beverly Hills tuberculosis hospital, something I did almost every Sunday at that time. I would talk to the patients and sometimes sing some gospel songs.

I went into this one room and here was my old enemy of a few years back. He looked gaunt and drawn and very sick, and I felt awfully sorry for him. I stayed with him for maybe twenty minutes, longer than with any of the others. I asked him about how he was coming along and tried to cheer him up as much as I could. Neither of us ever mentioned the bad debt experience, but without saying anything, I think I made it clear that all was forgotten as far as I was concerned. He seemed happier when I left than when I came.

While we're on the subject of forgetting and forgiving, you'll recall the story of my early days in Knoxville when my own band members fired me; well, I later hired two of those fellows to play with my band after I became established in radio. I felt that they had been led by the other guy and hadn't really wanted to do it. But when the third one asked me for a job, I said nothing doing. He was the one who hadn't said anything at all when they fired me, and I knew he was the ringleader. I figured that if I hired him again, he would find some way to stir up more trouble. It's great to forget and forgive, but you shouldn't carry it too far.

Well, we worked like the dickens to get the house built on a tract of land we had gotten from Pudge's mother in the Powell Community about twelve miles north of Knoxville. In fact, we still live there, although we have recently built a new house on the property and our son Phil lives in the old one. It's quiet there, well away from the city, and

I've never been tempted to move into any of more fashionable sections of town. My new house is pretty snazzy, and I guess it would look pretty good sitting in a swanky neighborhood, but I built it for Pudge and me to live in, not to show off to anybody. We have the same neighbors we've had for years, and we're comfortable there.

It took five years before the people who run those credit rating bureaus stopped listing me as a bad risk, and believe me that was a relief. It's no fun getting turned down for loans or having to pay cash for everything you buy, even automobiles. We're pretty well off now, and I guess I could charge just about any amount I wanted to most anywhere. I was telling a friend of mine about that experience a while back, and he said, "Arch, I just can't imagine you ever being broke." I told him I had not only been broke, but that I had been hungry, too, and hungry was worse.

TV Comes Along

I LEFT WNOX and the "Merry-Go-Round" again in 1949. I hadn't even thought about leaving because I was doing pretty well there and making a lot of concert appearances. But a fellow named Charlie DeVois had taken over as program director at WROL, which of course was WNOX's chief rival in Knoxville in those days. Now WROL had provided very poor competition for WNOX, and DeVois, who was a go-getter, decided to do something about it. They were getting beat in the ratings, badly. So DeVois and Stuart Adcock, the WROL manager, decided they needed a personality to get the station moving, and they went to New York and Chicago and all over the country in search of the right one. It was on one of their trips to Chicago that DeVois finally suggested that they try to "get old Grandpappy away from WNOX." Adcock agreed, and they called me long distance right then.

When I got the call, I told Charlie I would be glad to listen to him, but I doubted that he could say anything that would persuade me to leave WNOX.

Charlie said, "We'll pay you three hundred dollars a week."

I said, "You just said the right thing."

That was an unbelievable salary for a local radio station to pay in those days, and I just couldn't believe that Charlie was serious. To protect myself I said, "How long are we talking about?" and he said he would guarantee a year's contract.

Even then I didn't really want to leave the "Merry-Go-Round." After all, it was home to me. I had left it two or three times before, and I had always come back. So when I went to Dick Westergaard, who was the WNOX general manager at the time, I was hoping he would talk me out of it. But when he heard about the WROL offer, he just laughed and said, "They'll do anything to get their ratings up. You go on over there, and anytime you want to come back here we'll find a place for you."

Well, I was only making eighty-five dollars a week at WNOX, although that was pretty good pay back then, but I still didn't really want to leave. So I asked Westergaard, "Would you give me just a hundred dollars a week to stay?"

He said no, and I went to WROL.

We started a show called the "Country Playhouse" on WROL to run from 7:30 to 9:30 in the morning. Now that was against the number one radio personality in town, Lowell Blanchard, and his "Musical Clock" show, and how I hated to go up against my old buddy! But after the next ratings period (they were Hooper ratings then), it showed WNOX ahead by just a fraction of a point for those broadcast hours. In other words, we had pulled into a dead heat.

I guess you have to understand how radio works. The stations make their money off commercials, and the cost of commercial time is governed by the ratings. For instance, at that time, WNOX was getting fifteen dollars for a "spot" commercial, and WROL was getting eight dollars and a half. So, when the national advertisers saw that we had

pulled even in audience ratings, they all started switching over to WROL because they could get just as big an audience for about half the cost. After a while, we had reached the point where we had thirty-five spots in a two-hour show, and, believe me, that's a bunch of commercials.

With the morning show doing so well, we decided to try a noon hour show opposite the "Merry-Go-Round," which was biting off a pretty big chew because the "Merry-Go-Round" had just ruled the roost in Knoxville radio ever since we first went on the air with it back in the thirties. We called the new show the "Dinner Bell," and after the next ratings came out, we were virtually even with WNOX in that time slot, too. Along about this time, I learned that the ratings when I was at WNOX had been highest at the times I was on the air, but nobody had ever told me about it. People who run radio stations sometimes forget to tell you little things like that.

So I settled down at WROL, and things went well on radio. Then, in 1952, something new came along that was to change the lives of a lot of people, mine included, or maybe I should say mine especially—television. Just think of what an impact TV has had on our society, our habits, our patterns, our way of life! To think that just a relatively few years ago, it didn't even exist.

While I'm on the subject, let me go back in time to when I was a kid in Bulls Gap. This must have been in the late 1920s, and I was probably thirteen or fourteen years old. The "Grand Ole Opry" had started on WSM in Nashville, and we folks in Bulls Gap used to gather around the only radio set in the community and listen to it on Saturday nights. We would take turns using the ear plugs, and some of the older folks thought it was just a trick of some kind. They said it was impossible for somebody to be singing or picking in Nashville and somebody else to hear it all the way up in Bulls Gap.



Here I am with my first hairpiece in the mid-1950s. Now I'm never seen without it or my cigar, either.

But the man who owned the radio was a farmer named Joe Brown, and he was a very remarkable man, and he explained it to us. He had me stand ten feet away from him and he said something to me:

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Of course," I said.

"The reason you can hear me is because you have a receiver in your ears," he said. "Now, the radio receiver works the same way. It amplifies the sound waves it picks up. And I'll tell you something else. One of these days they'll have a machine where you will be able to see a picture of whoever is talking on the radio!"

Now, that was more than fifty years ago in a little old isolated community in East Tennessee. Here was a man who had little formal schooling and no specialized training in electronics predicting the development of television!

When TV came to Knoxville, there was a big hassle over who was going to get Channel 6 in Knoxville. WNOX made a big push for it, and a lot of people figured they would get it, but I think they were ruled out because of their tie-in with Scripps-Howard and the afternoon newspaper. In the end, WROL got it, and I think that may have been because of Stuart Adcock. He was a sort of pioneer in television and had developed a lot of technological devices. The Adcock antenna is still being used.

Anyway, we got the channel and, of course, our country music show became part of it. We called our first TV show the "Country Capers," and it ran thirty minutes one night a week. I got a good troupe together, excellent musicians and singers like L. E. White and Roy Sneed and Smoky White, and we had good guest talent on every show.

TV wasn't like it is now. Everything was live in those days. If you messed it up, you just had to clean up the mess and keep going. We had a little old studio with no air conditioning out on Sharp's Ridge in North Knoxville. It

took a lot of bright lights to get on the picture tube back then, and it was just insufferably hot in the studio. I used to dress and put on my makeup outside.

The show was sponsored by the East Tennessee Packing Company (Selecto meats). The Ed Huster Agency handled it, and Jack Kress was the agency man who worked with us. It did so well that we moved it to Chattanooga and Bristol and Johnson City, a few weeks in each place, to get our sponsor's products in front of the TV audiences there.

Jack Kress did a brilliant piece of marketing in the Chattanooga area. He brought us in, and we did about six weeks of the show, just plugging Selecto meats for all we were worth. The catch was, Chattanooga didn't have any Selecto products available in the stores. But we plugged them so hard that pretty soon people were calling the stores wanting to know when they could get them, and then the store managers started calling East Tennessee Packing Company wanting to know how they could go about getting them. It was a slick piece of advertising, and it sort of showed that we had a pretty good-sized audience, too.

As I said, we brought guest performers in from time to time, and I'll never forget one that I turned down. Jack Wiedemann, who was a staff announcer at WROL at the time, brought this tall, skinny young guy in and told me that he was a great singer. I said we would listen to him. It was true—he was a great singer—but I had to turn him down. I'll tell you why; he sang classical style music, and I knew that wouldn't go with our country fans. So I had to tell the fellow I was sorry but that we couldn't use him. His name was Jim Nabors, and, of course, he went on to become Gomer Pyle and one of the biggest stars on television. But if I had to make that decision again today, it would be the same one, because you have to do what's best in your situation at the time. There are not many

people in show business who haven't been turned down at some time or another.

Those were fun days in television, everything being live and spontaneous. There's no surprise element now with videotaping and all, but there sure was back then. I was still doing my Grandpappy character then, costume and all, and I remember one time when I was doing a skit with a fellow named Carpenter. It was sort of a dream sequence about the Civil War days, and I was supposed to be a Confederate soldier and he was a Union soldier. It was strictly slapstick stuff. I slapped his face. Then he took off his glove and hit me across the face with it. But he got so carried away that he hit me as hard as he could and knocked my hat and my wig off my head and my glasses off my face, and they all fell to the floor! We looked at each other, and just fell out laughing. It took two or three minutes to restore order, and, of course, we were on the air all the time.

I stayed with WROL until 1956, doing both radio and TV. Then factions developed at the station, which seems to happen pretty often in this business. One fellow in particular kept irritating me. He had a very high official position, and he would say things like, "Why should a hillbilly make more money than a top executive?"

Finally one day I said, "Did you ever stop to think that maybe the hillbilly is worth more to the station than you are?" I don't think he ever forgave me. I probably shouldn't have said it, but he kept bugging me.

I was okay as far as my job security was concerned. Anytime this guy would try to get in a lick against me the owner, Paul Mountcastle, would say, "If you're thinking about trying to get rid of Grandpappy, forget it. He stays."

Paul Mountcastle is one of the greatest people I've ever known, a super gentleman and sportsman and just a great man to be associated with. Of course, he later owned WSM

and I worked for him in Nashville, and he has always been a great friend of mine. But getting back to the WROL situation, I was just fed up with the factional strife and especially with this one man, and I left the station in 1956.

Then I made a big mistake. I had done pretty well and was fixed financially, for a while anyway, so I decided I just wouldn't do anything for an indefinite period of time. So I took off a whole year, 1957, and it almost drove me crazy. I played a lot of golf and did some work with my painting and a lot of things that I enjoy, but I missed that old feeling of accomplishment in getting something done, and I missed show business.

I used to go out to Archie's Grill in North Knoxville a lot in those days and drink coffee and shoot the breeze with a friend of mine named Marvin Thompson. Marvin was a gifted natural artist, far better than I was as far as natural talent was concerned, but he didn't have enough training in the basics. So I used to get on him all the time about studying. I'd say, "Why don't you go to school and study and learn how to use your talent?"

One day he fired right back at me. He said, "Here you are fussing at me, and you're not doing a damned thing yourself. I'll tell you what—I'll go to the Chicago Institute of Art if you'll go to Nashville and go on the 'Grand Ole Opry.' "

Well, I was fed up with lying around all the time anyway, so I called his bet. I headed for Nashville, looking for a job on the "Opry," and with no more assurance of success than I had had more than twenty years earlier when I had auditioned for my first radio show.

The Grand Ole Opry

At this time, 1958, the "Grand Ole Opry" was looking for a comic for the Prince Albert part of the program to replace Rod Brassfield, who had died. This part of the "Opry" went out on the national network, and the job paid pretty well. So I was just one of a number of country comedians who were trying to get the job. I needed to have something extra going for me, and believe me, I did. His name was Chet Atkins.

Now, I value friendship over almost everything. If a man (or woman) is my friend, then he's my friend and that's that. I'm with him all the way. Thank heaven Chet feels the same way, because when I came to Nashville I needed him. Chet had become a power in the music industry since I had first known him back on the "Merry-Go-Round" in the early forties. He was not only the finest guitar player in the business, but he also had a very important job as director of RCA Victor records there. He had, and still has, a tremendous instinct for spotting talent, and he was well-liked and respected all through the industry.

With Chet backing me, I felt like I had a good shot at the "Opry" spot, but I still had one tough customer for competition. He was Charlie Weaver. You will probably remember



The country clown at the "Grand Ole Opry" in the late 1950s before I put aside the hick costume to do my act in fashionable attire.

the funny old guy who used to be on the "Tonight Show" with Jack Paar. Well, it looked like Charlie and I were running one-two in the race, and I was afraid I was number two. But then, Charlie got so tied up with the Paar show that he felt he didn't have time enough to do the "Opry" show. So I got it.

It was here that I did a pretty monumental thing in my career. All through the years, at all the different radio and TV stations and in concert appearances, I had performed as the Grandpappy character. A lot of people I had known for years called me "Grandpappy" or "Pappy" instead of Archie. But I felt that it was time to make a change, and I discarded old Grandpappy for good. It was a big step to take, but I've never regretted it. Grandpappy had been good to me, but he had to go.

I also did something else that may have been a first for a country comic. Up until then, as far as I know, all country clowns had always appeared in some sort of costume. You know, the loose-fitting overalls or baggy pants or some kind of hick outfit. But after I had been on the "Opry" a while and had gotten my feet under me, I decided I would just go out on stage looking like a respectable person. So I bought a brand new mohair suit with a white shirt and tie and a nice pair of fashionable shoes.

I remember the first time I started out on stage that way, the "Opry" manager, Ott Devine, stopped me and said, "Where's your costume?"

"This is it," I said.

"You can't do a comedy part dressed like that," Ott said.

"Oh, yes, I can," I said. "People come here to laugh at our jokes, but I think they want to respect us as well. I just don't believe they want to see a rube anymore."

I guess I sounded pretty confident to Ott, but I really had a few lingering doubts. So I had gotten my best material together, just hoping that it would carry me through

and that people would forget all about what I was wearing. It worked. The audience responded real well, and I never had to go back to a costume again.

Now, this wasn't the first time I had ever been on the "Opry," although I think it was the first time anybody had ever noticed me. I made my first appearance on the "Opry" back in the late thirties, and I'll just back up for a while and tell about that. A man named Joe Frank, a real promoter in the business, came through Knoxville when I was doing pretty well on the "Midday Merry-Go-Round" and talked me into joining his troupe. He had Pee Wee King and his band and some other entertainers. Joe had had real good success with some other singers and comics; he was supposed to have been the man who put Gene Autry and Smiley Burnette in the big time, and he told me he could do the same thing for me. So I gave it a whirl.

Joe took us to Nashville, and we proceeded to almost starve to death. He couldn't find us any work. He did manage to get me a little slot on the "Opry," for three Saturday nights in my Grandpappy character. I didn't have a very prominent part in the show, and nobody paid much attention to me at all. So after three weeks, I told Joe I liked to eat too much to keep that up, and I went back to Knoxville. Joe got a young singer to replace me with his group. His name was Eddy Arnold. I don't know if Eddy did any better with the job than I did or not; things were pretty hard for all of us then. But he sure did awfully well later on, and it couldn't have happened to a nicer person. He's one of the best friends I have in the business.

Back to the "Opry" in the late 1950s now. It was just like coming back home to me because I had worked with so many of the "Opry" entertainers back on the "Midday Merry-Go-Round." Just offhand I can think of Chet Atkins, Roy Acuff, Carl Smith, Carl and Pearl Butler, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, Bill Carlisle, the Carter Family, and Kitty

Wells and Johnny Wright—all fellow alumni of the “Merry-Go-Round.” It was almost like a reunion.

Another old friend from Knoxville who showed up at WSM was Hal Durham, who had been a staff announcer at WROL when I worked there. Hal later became the manager of the “Grand Ole Opry,” a position he still holds in 1981. He is one of the most cooperative people I’ve ever known, and one of the most popular men in the country music business.

To me, and to any country music performer, there’s no place like the “Opry.” We have all dreamed of standing on the stage of the “Grand Ole Opry” some day. I have often been asked what has made the “Opry” so successful. After all, there have been lots of other country music shows. As far as I’m concerned, the great secret of the “Opry” is that it is so unrehearsed, so relaxed, so informal. It’s almost like a happening instead of a show, which in turn makes it the best show of all. People wander around backstage, visiting with each other, and there doesn’t seem to be any real pattern to it. But when those people get out on that stage and start performing, I’ll guarantee you that they’re one hundred percent professionals.

The “Opry” is like a closed club. You have to be a member to perform on it regularly, and for the entertainer who is a member it’s the easiest, most pressure-free show in the world to do. But to those who aren’t members, the pressure can be terrible. I’ve seen big artists from Hollywood have stagefright at the “Opry” like they’ve never had before. I guess that what makes it so frightening is that it is so much of a legend. It’s almost like a shrine.

Not long after I joined the “Opry” cast, a pretty little country girl out of Kentucky started singing on the show. Her name was Loretta Lynn, but that didn’t mean too much then. She hadn’t done anything big, but it was obvious to all of us that she was headed for big things. I re-

member once, backstage at the "Opry," when she got snubbed by a couple of other female singers, and she showed me what a champion she was.

Loretta is just about the friendliest girl in the world. She just loves people. On this occasion she was just being her natural warm, loving self, and she went up to these two girls and started talking to them. They just cut her down something awful. It was downright brutal. I was standing right there watching it. It really set her back, you could tell that, but she just straightened herself up and said, "For some reason you all don't like me, and I don't know why. But I tell you what, I like you anyways!"

It wasn't any of my business, but I was mad as hell about it. I went over and told those girls, "That was the cruelest thing that I've ever seen in my life. You two girls ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Well, Loretta went on to become the biggest female star in country music, and you don't hear much about those other girls now. I think I can tell you the secret of her success, beyond the fact that she is such a great singer. It's just this: people love her. I've done a lot of concert shows with her, and I've seen times when she had a hard time making it up to the stage because of the people who crowded around her, just wanting to touch her. Loretta Lynn is living proof that if you love people, they'll love you in return.

Then, a few years later, another little country girl showed up on the "Opry" stage, this one from Sevier County in East Tennessee. I had known Dolly Parton since she was a little girl, singing on Cas Walker's TV show back in Knoxville. You may not believe this, but she has that same quality of loving people that Loretta has. Dolly's a sexy-looking thing with those things bouncing around, and I'm sure that there are some women who probably think they wouldn't like her. But she's the warmest person in the

world, and if you turned her loose in a room full of strangers for thirty minutes, by the time she left everybody in that room would be crazy about her. She is the best I have ever seen at communicating with people.

The "Opry" finally left the old Ryman Theater a few years ago and moved out to the beautiful new place in Opryland. A lot of people opposed the move, but I wasn't one of them. I kept encouraging the WSM people to move it, because I was afraid something bad might happen in that old theater. It was an old wooden structure, and if it had caught fire during a performance, we could have had a holocaust. I appreciate the Ryman's history as much as anybody else, but I don't miss it. We've kept that same informality backstage at the new place.

I didn't move to Nashville for a long while after I joined the "Opry." Since I was only there during the weekends, I stayed in Knoxville the rest of the time. I was staying at Chet's house when I came over to do the shows, and he and I spent a lot of time together. As if he hadn't already helped me enough, he started helping me in other ways. There were some other national shows being produced in Nashville that I wanted to get on, like the "Pet Milk Show." The "Opry" spot was fine, but I needed some other things to go with it.

So Chet started taking me all over Nashville. We would go to lunch in the popular downtown restaurants, and, of course, a lot of people knew Chet and he would introduce me to them. He would always introduce me as his best friend. Being Chet Atkins's best friend carried a lot of weight in Music City, and it wasn't too long before people started taking notice of me. I remember the man who ran the "Pet Milk Show" saying, "Oh yes, Archie Campbell. We've got to have you on our show." It was all because of Chet. I know I can't ever repay him for what he has done for me, although he is kind enough to remember that I

gave him a boost when he was starting out. The way I figure it, that's the way friendship is supposed to work.

I ran into another old friend in Nashville that I had worked with back in Knoxville, Eddie Parker. This was a bit later on, after I had pretty well established myself there. Eddie and I had done radio and TV shows in the early fifties, and I always thought he was one of the best showmen I knew. I'd never heard anybody who could match him as a disc jockey, and he had a way of handling audiences that you couldn't believe. We'd be doing a show and visiting with the people in the audience, and Eddie would just flat insult them. He'd say things like, "Why don't you hush? You're the talkingest woman I ever saw in my life!" They just loved it. I guess I learned as much about communicating with the audience from Eddie as anybody I've ever been around.

We had sort of drifted away from each other there for a long while. Eddie had gone back up to Kingsport and wasn't doing anything, and Chet and I both kept after him to get off his ass and get back to work because he just had too much talent to let it waste. Finally he did come to Nashville, and we helped him get a job at a radio station doing the news, and now he's probably the most popular news reporter in the city.

Eddie's got more brass than anybody. He'll kid around with the governor or the president, it doesn't matter to him. I remember one time when he was interviewing a top state medical official about venereal disease. He went through a bunch of serious questions and the doctor responded, saying that venereal disease had just about reached the epidemic stage in Nashville. Then Eddie hit the pause button on his tape recorder, so he would be able to edit the tape later, and said, "Just one more question, Doctor? Are you getting any these days?"

The doctor stammered around for several seconds and

finally exploded. "Why, you son of a bitch!" he said. Eddie just laughed to beat the band. He still plays that tape for friends.

After I started getting more and more work to do in Nashville, I decided I'd better get an apartment of my own. I told Chet, and he said, "Why don't you just stay here with us?" but I figured I had been under his feet long enough. Friendship is great, but you can overdo anything. So I took an apartment with the long-range plan of buying a home in Nashville and bringing Pudge and boys over if things kept going good.

Rinderella Slops Her Dripper

THINGS did keep going good. Here I was, twenty-five years in the business, and suddenly old Arch was getting to be in demand. I did the "Opry" and the other radio shows. I was getting more personal appearance bookings. I was also working for two different music publishing houses, the Southern Music Publishing Company and the Peer International Company out of New York. Later on, my schedule got so full that I had to quit the publishing end of the business and stick to performing, but I enjoyed the work while I did it and the association with the people in that end of the trade.

One of the best things that happened for me along in here—the early 1960s—was that I started recording for RCA Victor. With Chet's help, of course. I had made a few records earlier, back in the 1950s, but they had no promotion behind them and none of them ever hit the charts. Now, with a major company like RCA behind me, here was an opportunity to break through in a part of the business that had been denied me previously.

I was very fortunate to get some good breaks with my first RCA recordings. I think you have to be a little bit lucky anytime something good happens to you, but I am

sort of proud that I was able to do something that not too many country artists have done: I made both comedy and singing records and did pretty well in both fields for a few years. My first one, "Trouble in the Amen Corner," got me off to a good start, and I think it reached number three in the charts. Then I did "The Cockfight," a comedy routine, and it sold more than the first one. I really hit it big with "Hockey Here Tonight," which was a takeoff on a country boy going to his first hockey match. I don't know how many that one sold, but it must have done pretty well because for a long time I seemed to hear it everywhere I went.

Then I made my biggest comedy record, "Rindercella," the Spoonerism version of "Cinderella." Now, a lot of people don't know what Spoonerisms are, but actually they're one of the oldest forms of verbal comedy, based on the transposition of consonant sounds in different words. There was already a Spoonerism version of "Cinderella" that had been around so long that nobody knew who originated it, but I didn't particularly like it. So I sat down and wrote out my own version, trying to get better and funnier sounds in it. For one thing, I started out with "Once Upon a Time" without Spoonerizing it because I felt that I had to have an introduction that would be clear to the listeners and would establish it as a fable right off.

Just to show how Spoonerisms work, here's the text of "Rindercella" as I recorded it in the RCA studios in Nashville in 1965.

Once upon a time in a coreign fountry there lived a geautiful birl and her name was Rindercella. Now Rindercella lived with her mugly other and two sad blisters.

Also in this same coreign fountry there was a very pransome hince, and this pransome hince was going

to have a bancy fall, and he invited the people from riles amound, especially the pich reople.

Now Rindercella's mugly other and her two sad blisters went out to buy some dancy fresses to wear to this bancy fall. But Rindercella couldn't go because all she had to wear was some old rirty dags.

Finally the night of the bancy fall came around and Rindercella couldn't go, so she just kat down and shried. And she was kitting there shrying when all at once there appeared before her her gary mudfather, and he touched her with his wagic mand and there appeared before her a kig boach with hix white sorses to take her to the bancy fall. But he said, "Rindercella, be sure and be home by nidnight, or I'll purn you into a tumpkin."

When Rindercella arrived at the bancy fall, the pransome hince met her at the door because he had been watching behind a widden hindow. And Rindercella and the pransome hince nanced all dite and they lell in fove.

And finally the mid-clock struck night and Rindercella staced down the rairs and just as she beached the rottom she slopped her dripper!

The next day this pransome hince went all over the coreign fountry looking for this geautiful birl who had slopped her dripper. Finally he came to Rindercella's house and he tried it on her mugly other and it fidn't dit. And then he tried it on her two sigly usters and it fidn't dit. Then he tried it on Rindercella and it fid dit! It was exactly the sight rise.

So they were married and lived heavily after hapwards. Now, the storal of the mory is this: If you go to a bancy fall and you want to have a pransome hince lall in fove with you, don't forget to slop your dripper!

Like a lot of other things that happen in show business, "Rindercella" was almost an accident. I wanted to do the record, but nobody seemed very excited about it, and I had a hard time getting the studio and the technicians to do it. On the day that I finally cut it, both recording sessions were taken up, one from 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M., and the other a night session that started at six o'clock. So I said to Chet, "Just let me run in the studio between five and six, and I can do this thing in fifteen or twenty minutes."

He said, "Okay, but be sure and get through by six because we'll need the studio."

I needed an audience, because I wanted some live laughter on the record, and so I rounded up all the secretaries I could find and asked them if they would stay about a half-hour past their normal quitting time, and most of them did. Jerry Reed, who wasn't a star at all at that time but just sort of a side man who hung around the studios and played the guitar for background music, said he would be glad to help out. That was a real break, because Jerry really helped make the record a success. You see, there is nothing better than real genuine laughter and nothing worse than forced laughter, and Jerry really got tickled. Once he got tickled the others did, too.

I told Jerry and the girls, "Now, when I hold up a finger, I want you to laugh." We got started, and after a couple of sentences I held up a finger and they laughed. I did it again, and they laughed again. Then Jerry started getting tickled when I said that Rindercella didn't have anything to wear except her old "rirty dags." By the time I got to "slopped her dripper" they were really going at it.

So "Rindercella" turned out great because we had some spontaneous laughter and not just the canned stuff that you usually hear on comedy records. It became such a big hit that I had to do it everywhere I went for a long time.

During this time I was making vocal recordings as well

as comedy numbers. Sometimes I think that being a comic has sort of gotten in the way as far as my singing is concerned; I guess it's hard for people to take you seriously as a singer when you're always playing the clown. But actually, I was a singer before I was a comic. That's how I got my start in the business.

Although I sure don't claim to be the world's greatest singer, I have always felt I could do justice to a number of different kinds of songs, starting, of course, with the old country ballads and hymns that I learned when I was a kid in Bulls Gap. I never have ranked myself too high as a guitar picker; there are so many great ones around that I would rate way down the line there. But at this particular point in my career I was doing pretty well as a singer, and my records were selling. I think that my favorite during this period was probably "The Men in My Little Girl's Life." It's one of those half-sing, half-recital pieces, and it's really a lovely song. Mike Douglas made a very successful record of it later on, but I think that my version was first and it did real well. You know, there are things that you do that you'll look back at later and not feel so good about. But that recording is one that I can listen to now and feel real proud.

So that's how it was with me in Nashville in the mid-1960s. I was making records and selling them and working on the "Opry" and doing a lot of concerts. I just didn't see how things could get much better, but I was wrong. There were a couple of things waiting just around the corner that were destined to give my career an upward turn. The first was that I was about to join forces with a female vocalist named Lorene Mann. The second was an idea that some TV producers had about doing a country music variety series on national television. "Hee Haw" was getting ready to move into my life, but, of course, I didn't know it at the time.

Lorene Mann is basically a songwriter and a very good one, too, with a number of hits to her credit. But she is also a fine singer with a very smooth, easy-to-listen-to style, and our producer, Bob Ferguson, felt that she and I could do a pretty good blend. So we teamed up on a series of records, mostly country-type songs that had a sort of rock-and-roll beat. Half country and half rock, I guess you'd say. They were really very easy songs to do, and it was easy and pleasant to work with Lorene.

"Dark End of the Street," one of our first songs together, turned out to be a hit for us. Then we hit it big with a sort of simple, soulful ballad called "Let Me Wrap You in My Warm and Tender Love." That had a sort of haunting melody to it with very simple lyrics, and I guess it's the favorite of the songs I did with Lorene.

We were either the first male-female singing team to make it in Nashville in the sixties or the next thing to it. Conway and Loretta, Porter and Dolly, and Jim Ed and Helen all came along after we did. We did a number of concert tours together, and it was an association that worked well for both of us. But we couldn't keep it up; as I said, she was primarily a writer, and I had my comedy acts and separate personal appearances to do working as a single. So we split up the act after a couple of years with nothing but good feelings on both sides. She's a good girl, and I enjoyed working with her.

Somewhere along in here I had managed to persuade Pudge to move to Nashville with me, because I was just too busy there to spend much time back in Knoxville at all. Now, that wasn't easy to do, because Pudge loved that home we built out in the Powell Community as much as any woman could love a home. Of course, she knew all her neighbors and was at home with them, and then, too, she had wanted the boys to go to the neighborhood schools. So, whenever I would bring up the subject of

moving, she would usually change the subject. I finally got her to come to Nashville and go house-hunting with me, but she broke down and cried at the first house we were shown.

She went on back to Knoxville, but I kept looking, and after a while I ran across a house that I liked, and I knew she would like it, too. It was out in Brentwood, which is probably the number two suburban area of Nashville as far as ritzy is concerned, right behind Belle Meade. A lot of the country music people have built homes there. Anyway, I found this place, and the price was a little more than I felt I could swing, but it turned out that my old friend Eddy Arnold owned it, or at least his real estate company had it, and I managed to get it chopped down a few thousand. I didn't have time to consult with Pudge, and I knew she would probably stubborn up on me anyway, so I just signed the papers and plunked down the down payment.

I was in Dallas that night for a concert appearance, and I called her from there and said, "I just bought us a house out in Brentwood."

She said, "Don't buy it until I see it."

I said, "You must have misunderstood me, woman. I said I've already bought it."

Well, she wasn't too happy about that, but after she saw the house, she was pleased, and I knew she would be. It was a great place, and we enjoyed it the years we lived there. We bought it in 1966 and sold it twelve years later for about \$50,000 more than we paid for it. That's inflation, I guess, but I'll guarantee you the people who bought it from us got a good deal.

Now we were settled in Nashville as a family, Pudge and me and the boys, Steve and Phil, although Steve was just about grown by this time. These were good years for me, the mid-1960s, and they were good for the country music business. Television and the Music City recording center

had opened up a lot of new opportunities for country music artists, including some old veterans like me who had been knocking around for thirty years. I found myself making personal appearances all over the country with people like Loretta Lynn and Ernest Tubb. I made an appearance on the "Ed Sullivan Show," one of the last shows Sullivan did before his death. In terms of money and prestige, I was more successful than I had ever been.

A Show Is Born

STILL more success, far more than I had ever dreamed of, was ahead for me, although, of course, I didn't realize it at the time. I couldn't just look out there in the future and see "Hee Haw" popping up over the horizon. I couldn't, but I know somebody who did. I don't know how he did it, but he did.

His name is Dr. David Hoy, and first let me tell how we happened to meet. Chet Atkins and I used to hang around a lot in those days with a good friend named Jack Stapp, who got Tree Publishing Company going and later became its president. Jack is dead now, and I miss him. He was a great guy, and he and I and Chet were so close that they called us "The Three Musketeers." One day we set out for our usual lunch together, and Chet told Jack and me that he had met an interesting man that he wanted us to meet. Chet's like that; he sort of collects interesting people. It doesn't matter if they're great artists or farmers or what, he just likes to be around them. So, when we had lunch that day, Dr. David Hoy joined us.

Now, Dr. Hoy was (and still is) a psychic or mentalist, and I guess he's just about the best there is in that field. But I didn't know that at the time. Chet introduced me to



A high point for me: "Comedian of the Year" honors at the Country Music Association awards program. Left to right: Bill McElhany, Danny Davis, Tammy Wynette, June Carter Cash, Johnny Cash, Chet Atkins, Archie Campbell, and Bob Ferguson.

this big, handsome, bearded guy, and he pointed a finger at me and said, "Archie Campbell. In April or May of next year you will get a call and it will be an offer of a network television show, and it will be a big success. Now what do you think of that?"

I didn't exactly know what to think. I guess I stammered something like, "That's fine. That's great. And I guess I'm going to make a lot of money out of it, too?"

"You don't believe in ESP, do you?" asked Dr. Hoy.

I said, "Listen, I don't disbelieve in hardly anything. If you had told me forty years ago that we would have people walking around and talking and singing on a little screen in the living room, I wouldn't have believed you. But now I'm open. I don't rule anything out."

A couple of weeks later I got a copy of David Hoy's latest book in the mail. It was inscribed, "To my good friend Archie Campbell, who doesn't believe in my predictions."

The incident passed, and I sort of forgot about it. Moving on to a national TV show was about the furthestest thing from my mind. In fact, Pudge and I were about ready to move back to Knoxville. We had kept our home there, and things had gone so well in Nashville in recent years that I felt we could move back there and sort of ease up a bit. I figured I could maybe do a little local TV show and make some concert appearances and play all the golf I wanted. I could always commute to Nashville to do the work I had to do there. So we were getting all packed up to move, and, as a matter of fact, I was out in the garage stowing my golf clubs in the car when the call came.

It was from a man named John Aylesworth in Hollywood, and he said, "I would like for you to test for a TV show, and we'll pay all your travel and expenses."

Of course, I said yes; you don't get a call inviting you to try out for a national television show every day. I didn't

waste any time getting ready, and in a couple of days I was out on the coast.

The three men in charge of that first "Hee Haw" organizational meeting were Aylesworth, Frank Peppiatt and Bill Davis, the director. The only other country performer who was in at the beginning was Gordie Tapp, who is a brilliant comic and writer and who has been on the show all through the years. Now, Roy Clark and Buck Owens—the two stars of the program—had already been lined up for their parts, but outside of them, Gordie and I were the first ones hired. The reason for that was that we were both writers as well as stand-up comics, and we were needed to get the material and routines together for the first shows.

I want to confess something, after all these years. There were some things I didn't like about the "Hee Haw" idea when they first told Gordie and me what the plan was. First, it was supposed to be a sort of country version of "Laugh-In," and I didn't think much of that. I've always felt that a show or routine should have its own identity and not be a direct copy of something else, although, of course, there is a lot of copying going on in the business. This problem has sort of taken care of itself down through the years. I don't think that "Hee Haw" resembles "Laugh-In" very much anymore. It has developed a style and pattern of its own. The other thing that bothered me was the name—"Hee Haw." I thought to myself, "That sounds like a donkey's laugh or something."

But I'll admit that I didn't say anything to John or Frank or Bill about those things. They say honesty is the best policy, and I believe it, but when you've knocked around in show business for more than thirty years and you finally get a shot at a national TV show, you just don't say anything that's going to upset the producer and director. So I just kept my mouth shut, and I'm glad I did.

Finally, after they had outlined the plan for the show, they said, "Would you be interested?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" I said.

They put Gordie and myself to work preparing scripts for the early shows. We stayed at the Sunset Marquis, which at that time seemed to have nothing but show people staying there. I was like a big hick tourist. I saw Paul Lynde and some other stars, and I bumped into Harry Bellafonte on the elevator one time. I found myself saying, "Hey, I know you!" in a gee whiz voice, and I could have bitten my tongue off. He sort of turned away, and I thought, "How stupid can you get?" The lifestyle around there was a little different from what I was used to; the marijuana smoke was so thick in the elevators sometimes that you could get high on it, but I never went that route. They had parties going on all the time, but I never tried to crash any. Gordie's right at home anywhere, and I think he showed up at a few of them.

As Gordie and I worked on the comedy material and sketches, I was able to draw on my years in the business and use a lot of old material that went all the way back to my days with Lowell Blanchard on the old "Midday Merry-Go-Round" when I was first starting out. The skits that I did on those early shows—the judge, the doctor, the barbershop scene—were all written from routines and gags that I had done at some earlier time. To show you how timeless humor is, all those skits are still part of the show and still going strong. Gordie and I exchanged ideas with the producers and director and were able to suggest the names of people that we felt could help make the show a success—like Grandpa Jones and String Bean and Junior Samples and Minnie Pearl and Jimmy Riddle and so on. After we had written enough material, we all moved back to Nashville and got the whole crew together and taped the first series of twelve shows. Bill Davis was in charge of



The barbershop set on "Hee Haw." Left to right: old Arch with Billy Carter, Roy Clark, and producer John Aylesworth.

the taping sessions, and he put the whole thing together and made it work. He's a real genius.

We did the taping in May, and the first "Hee Haw" show was to be aired in June of 1969, and for some reason I got to thinking about what David Hoy had said to me when I first met him—about the call coming in April or May (it came in April) and about the show being a big success. He had sure called it right so far. Now, it remained to be seen whether "Hee Haw" would be the big hit that he had predicted, or whether it would lay a big egg like one of the animated cartoon chickens on the show. I went to Gatlinburg, where I had a summer show at a theater there, and just sort of held my breath to see what the reaction would be to that first show.

Hee Haw

"HEE HAW" first went on the CBS television network as a summer replacement for the Smothers Brothers, who had been fired by the CBS brass. The dismissal of the Smothers Brothers came about pretty quickly, and, as a result, "Hee Haw" was actually put on the air without a pilot show, one of the few times that has ever happened in network television at least in recent years. The first show in June of 1969 was just raked over the coals by the critics.

Jack Gould of the *New York Times* said that "Hee Haw" was the biggest piece of ---- you'll ever see in your life and predicted that it would last three weeks, maybe. Almost all the reviews were pretty much along that same vein, except for one critic in Washington who said it was the kind of thing that would probably last.

Since I was in Gatlinburg at the time, I wasn't around in Nashville to get the reaction of the people along Music Row, but I was told later that it was just about as negative as New York or the other big towns. There were some people who thought that the show was putting country music down, and I expect there was a little touch of jealousy involved, too. About the only important Nashville personality who predicted that the show would be a hit was Chet

Atkins. Like I've said before, Chet has a way of picking winners.

The initial reception at CBS headquarters in New York was just as bad as the critics' reviews. After that first show, the people up there just didn't want to talk about "Hee Haw" very much. Perry Lafferty, a CBS executive who later took a big hand in making the show a success, told us that a lot of the people there would just turn their heads when the show was mentioned so they wouldn't have to discuss it.

Now, I could see why some people would criticize the program. It wasn't very sophisticated, and it was corny. But at the same time there was an awful lot of good, honest humor packed into that one hour, and a lot of good country music as well. That was where "Hee Haw" departed from the "Laugh-In" format; we had a show that featured music as well as comedy. I had had some reservations myself at the start, but by this time I was convinced that "Hee Haw" was a good show, no matter what the critics said. Thank the Lord the critics don't always represent the entire audience. No matter who panned it, the people who were watching their TV sets liked "Hee Haw." It was light, it was funny, and it was different.

The ratings for the first week of the show had us up there pretty high, but we knew that didn't mean a lot because you always have novelty appeal when a show first comes on the air. So as we went into the second week, everybody expected the ratings to drop. But somehow we were up higher than we had been the first week. Then in the third week, we performed the unbelievable by virtually tying for number one. By the fourth week we were number one, and we stayed that way for the next two years, jockeying in and out of the top spot with "Bonanza" and "Mary Tyler Moore" and some other shows. The little



Nurse Goodbody assists old Doctor Campbell.

old corny country program that almost all the critics had panned had fooled them all.

Well, we hung up there near the top of the ratings for two full years which is a long time in television, and then a funny thing happened that wasn't written into any of the scripts: we got cancelled!

What happened was that CBS had undergone a big changeover in its front office. There was a new president with a new staff of top officers, and they decided to change the network's programming. No more down-home folksy stuff, which let us out, but we were in good company. Lawrence Welk was dropped, too, by ABC.

You can imagine how the news hit us. We had established a pretty happy "Hee Haw" family in those two years, and we felt that we had done a good job. You don't stay in the top twenty in the ratings on sheer luck, you know. But in spite of all that, here we were on the way out. It wasn't the best day in my life, I'll tell you that.

But "Hee Haw" wasn't dead, not by a long shot. There was the possibility of going "syndicate," which simply means that the show is sold to each station individually rather than going out on the network. In other words, the show sets up its own network. There was a lot of furious dickering going on there after CBS dropped its bombshell about whether to try and syndicate the show or not.

Then Sam Luvello, who was our producer by that time, said, "Let's go to the NAB convention in New Orleans and see if they won't buy it." The NAB is the National Association of Broadcasters, and it includes every TV station in the country. Sam's job was to make a pitch for "Hee Haw" and then try to sell it to as many stations as he could on an individual basis. Well, that first day he sold fifty stations! In just two or three days he had picked up as many as we had had on CBS. I forget what the exact figures were, something over 200 stations, and what gave us the biggest kick was that most of them were CBS affiliates! I'll always give Sam credit for saving "Hee Haw."

I don't think there has ever been another television show put together with a group like the "Hee Haw" family. I've been in show business for about forty-five years now, and I've never been associated with finer people, from the top production people on through the entertainers and the backstage workers that the public never hears about. "Hee Haw" is unique. In all these years and all these shows, "Hee Haw" has never fired anybody! I believe that we have all gotten a raise each year, except maybe for the year when we were switching over from CBS to syndicate. Even then, they just asked us to hold on until things got straightened out.

I've been asked many times why I thought "Hee Haw" had managed to endure all these seasons on television, when so many high-powered shows have fallen right and left. Well, first of all, on any kind of variety show you just have to have outstanding entertainers, and we've got them. There are so many people on the show with such a great range of talents that the audience never really gets to see them do all they can do. For instance, Gordie Tapp can talk in just about every dialect known to man, and Don Harron (Charlie Farquinson) can speak seven different languages fluently and play almost any kind of role. He started out as a Shakespearean actor! Almost everyone on the show can sing or play an instrument or do both, and they can also do comic turns. Also, I think that if a show is going to be a success over a long period of time it has to be honest—genuine—real. And "Hee Haw" is that. What you see is what we are.

My own contributions to the show have been in helping to write the script and in doing a number of skits. The barbershop skit, the courtroom skit, the doctor's skit (with Nurse Goodbody) and the "Pfft You Are Gone" skit, where I usually wind up spitting in a guest star's face, have all been on the show since it started. I chose the barbershop,

courtroom, and doctor's office scenes because there is no end to the material we can find to use for them. I had a lot of old gags, going back to my early years in radio, that we have worked into them. Everybody has visited a barber shop and a doctor's office, and most everyone has been in a courtroom a few times. So they were familiar everyday places that the viewer felt comfortable with. Some of the skits, particularly the doctor routine and the courtroom act, are just out-and-out slapstick the way you could have seen it on the burlesque circuit years ago.

I've always been a singer as well as a comic, but when we put "Hee Haw" together, there were so many fine singers in the cast that I didn't think they needed me to join in. So, except for a few of the early programs, I haven't done much singing on the show. But I have done this little comic number, "Pfft, You Are Gone," on almost every show since the series began, and it became a sort of a signature song for me. People will come up to me and start reciting, "I've searched the world over and thought I'd found true love."

"Pfft, You Are Gone" was written into the first shows because we wanted to get our guest stars involved with a regular on the show. Otherwise, with the taping schedule the way it is, it would be possible for a guest to come and do his piece and leave without ever having seen anybody on the "Hee Haw" cast. The song was one I had recorded back when I was doing a lot of singles, and to tell the truth it never really did anything much on the charts. But when we were looking for a comic song for that bit, it seemed to be ideal.

Now, there are writer's royalties and copyrights involved when a song gets network exposure, and we really didn't know who the author of "Pfft, You Are Gone" was. The credit was listed to a writer named Susan Heather, but no one in our company had ever heard of her. So we decided



Defendents sometimes get strange justice when they go up before "Judge" Campbell.

to go ahead and use it, and after a few weeks, an old friend of mine named Bix Reichner called me up and said, "I want to thank you for using my song on 'Hee Haw.' I'm going to make a lot of money off of it." Bix is a New York writer who has done a lot of background music for soap operas and things like that, but I didn't know of any song that he had written for us. So I asked him what he was talking about, and he said it was "Pfft, You Are Gone."

I said, "Somebody named Susan Heather wrote that song."

He said, "I hate to tell you this, Arch, but I am Susan Heather." It turned out that he had written the song under a fictitious name because he was under contract to another company at the time, something that is done fairly often in this business. Anyway, he's a nice guy, and I'm glad he's made some money out of his song because it has been good to me.

I've done "Pfft, You Are Gone" with just about every guest we've had on the show. If you've watched "Hee Haw," I'm sure you'll remember how the scene is set—two people, one facing the camera and one turned the other way. Actually, it's based on that classic *American Gothic* painting of the old farmer with his hayrake and his wife in her bonnet. I'll just run down a short list of some of the people I've worked with on that skit: Tennessee Ernie Ford, Dennis Weaver, Johnny Cash, George Gobel (my old friend from Chattanooga days), Loretta Lynn, Merle Haggard, Conway Twitty, Kenny Rogers, and sports figures like Roger Maris and Johnny Bench.

Of course, the laugh comes at the end of the song when I get to the "Pfft" part and spray the guest. There have been all sorts of variations off of it. Sometimes the guest will spray me, and sometimes we'll both get tickled and bust out laughing, and in this sort of gag that's good. Nothing is as funny as genuine laughter.

Sometimes the variations off the "Pfft" skit can get a little wild. The one I remember best was when some of the others rigged it up so that Johnny Cash would hit me in the face with a big creamy pie. But instead of whipped cream or meringue, they used shaving cream. That stuff got in my eyes, and I thought I was going to die. He really socked it to me, and my eyes burned for hours afterwards.



"Pfft, you are gone" with Ernest Borgnine.

Happy Family

I'M proud of the part I've played in the success of "Hee Haw," but I'll guarantee you I'm just as proud of having had the opportunity to work with the other people on the cast. They're great entertainers and great people, and I'm not saying that for any propaganda reasons. With a national TV show like this, you might expect to find some temperamental stars and petty jealousies and ego problems, but I'll bet that we have less of that than any show going. We truly have a close family. We're not only fellow performers; most of us are very good friends. So I'm going to say a few things about the other people on the show.

I'll start with the co-stars, Roy Clark and Buck Owens, because they've been responsible for much of the success that the show has enjoyed. I think that Roy is the greatest all-around talent in country music today and one of the greatest talents in all of show business. The thing about Roy is that he can not only do everything—sing, play a number of instruments, and do comedy skits—but he can do them better than almost anybody else—just a fantastic talent. I sometimes worry about Roy because it seems to me that he works too hard. He just keeps on and on and



My good friend and fellow showman, Roy Clark, and me on the "Hee Haw" set.

on until he wears out. But he loves his work, and I guess that's his style.

Buck is a fine country singer with a highly individual style and a solid showman who always knows how to please the audience. There's something else about Buck that most people probably don't know: he is a brilliant businessman, one of the smartest I've ever run across. Buck is a good friend of mine, and anytime I can't make a decision on a business matter I go to him, and in about one minute he'll tell me what I should do.

Grandpa Jones is a great favorite of mine and a favorite of just about everybody else's, too. If you don't like Grandpa, you don't like anybody. He is just what he seems to be on television, a warm, friendly man who always has a sparkle in his eyes and a smile on his lips. Grandpa is probably the country music personality who is the most quoted by others in the business. I'm always hearing somebody say, "Did you hear what Grandpa said?" He's probably the most free-hearted man I ever saw. If you go have a meal with him in a restaurant, he'll fight you to get the check.

Grandpa was a great friend of String Bean, who was another man that everybody liked. String, whose real name was David Ackerman, and his wife Estella were murdered at their little home on the lake several years ago, and that was a shock that the "Hee Haw" family still hasn't gotten over. Such a horrible, senseless thing! If you ever knew String, you just couldn't see how anyone could ever harm a hair on his head; he was such a gentle person. He did have a lot of money. He had made a lot and hadn't spent much of it because he didn't really want much out of life except to go fishing every day. So I guess the people who did that awful thing thought that he would be carrying it around on him.

String was just as funny off stage as he was on. He had

his own unique perspective on things, and he never let the commercial end of show business mess up his values. Chet Atkins still gets a laugh out of something that String said to him one day. He came to see Chet and said, "Chet, I have wrote a song that I want you to hear. Now, you may like it or you may not like it, but it don't make no difference because I'm going fishing tomorrow anyway!"

Gordie Tapp is a "Hee Haw" performer who is very close to me because we worked together so many long hours and days helping to put the first series of shows together. Here's another great talent. He's one of the finest all-around showmen I've ever known. Gordie can do every accent you've ever heard—British, Boston, deep South, anything. He's really a master dialectician. What he does on "Hee Haw" doesn't even skim the surface of his talents. Gordie plays the part of the harassed storekeeper (Maynard's boss) and the slovenly spouse opposite Roni Stoneman in the husband-wife skit, plus a lot of other roles.

Don Harron is another performer who has more talent than any one man has a right to have. Don is the actor who does the Charlie Farquinson skit, the hick radio announcer on station KORN. As I said earlier, Don is a master of seven languages and their dialects. He worked for years on the old TV show, "The FBI in Peace and War," and did just about every kind of part for them. On one show he would be a Russian and on the next a Britisher or Frenchman. He really works at getting into his part, too. He's actually a very handsome, distinguished-looking fellow, but when he comes into Nashville for the "Hee Haw" taping, he lets his beard grow for several days and turns up looking just as scroungy as he can for his role.

We've got a bunch of very funny people on the show. Gaillard Sartain, who plays the part of Maynard, the grocer's assistant, is one of the most naturally funny

people I've ever known. Most of us have to try to be funny; Gaillard doesn't. He's just funny by nature. But he works awfully hard at his craft, and he is highly creative. For instance, it takes him a lot longer to tape his skits than it takes me to do mine. I like to have my routine all laid out before I start. But Gaillard will pick up ideas as the skit moves along and blend them into it, and the routine will always end up better than when he started out.

George Lindsay is another good comic, basically a slapstick comic. George played the part of Goober on the old "Andy Griffith Show," and a lot of people still call him that. Like me, he's a big sports nut. I go down to Montgomery, Alabama, just about every year to play in his golf tournament.

Kenny Price, the biggest man on the show, is a good friend of mine. I talked Kenny into changing his record label to RCA a few years back, and then I helped persuade him to turn comic on "Hee Haw." I'm not real sure I did him a favor there. He's a fine comedian, but once you're tagged as a comedian people sort of forget about your singing, and I think that Kenny is one of the finest country singers around.

There is an interesting story behind John Henry Faulk, the philosophical humorist that you see in the barbershop skits. John Henry was a radio and TV actor in New York back in the 1950s, and during the McCarthy craze, he got blacklisted by a group called Alert Inc. It pretty well ruined his career there, and it took him something like five years to clear his name through the courts. But he finally was awarded a three and a half million dollar libel judgment against them.

John Henry and the Reverend Grady Nutt have only been with us the last three or four years. Grady Nutt is a real, honest-to-gosh minister, and the material he uses is always true stories from real life. Tom Lutz, one of the

"Hee Haw" writers, brought him up to do a barbershop skit, and he did so well that he was hired permanently. He has one of the fastest, sharpest deliveries I've ever heard.

The singing Hager brothers, Jim and John, are identical twins. They've been with us from the start, and I'll admit it: I still don't know one from the other. Jimmy Riddle and Jackie Phelps, the two guys who do the funny noises with the "Hambone" routine, are both old friends of mine and longtime "Grand Ole Opry" performers. Jimmy's a fine guy and a real good musician, and he was one of the people that I suggested for the show when it started. Jackie is a fine guitar player. I think that Buck Trent does a very funny routine with that banjo number that always ends up with "Oh, Yeah," and the fast-talking Jack Burns is a big addition to the show. You know, he's the one who works with George Lindsay in the city slicker-country hick routine, who always winds up getting outslicked by the hick. Jack is a very talented comedian who has done some directing and producing of his own.

Of course, I've already written about Roy Acuff and how much I've always thought of him. Roy's just about the oldest friend I've got in this business, going all the way back to when I started at WNOX in 1936, and he's always been as straight as a string.

And the ladies, bless their hearts, have meant a lot to "Hee Haw." Minnie Pearl is the best known of them, one of the big names in our business. Minnie may play the part of the man-crazy old maid out in the sticks, but in reality she is one of the shrewdest business people in the industry. She was one of the first to prove that recognition is the big thing in show business. You have to establish yourself as something, and she did that with her funny-looking hats and her signature opening line, "How-dee."

Roni Stoneman, who plays Gordie Tapp's wife in the husband-wife skit, is another veteran in the business. She

is a member of the Pop Stoneman family, one of country music's most famous families, and Roni is a great banjo player as well as comic.

I very much admire Lulu Roman. Lulu kicked a drug habit and came back stronger than ever. She was pretty badly hooked on drugs, I guess, and was arrested and charged several years ago in her hometown, Dallas. But when she went before the judge, she told him that if he gave her the chance she would straighten up. He told her that she would have to devote much of her time to religious work and helping rehabilitate other people, and she did. Now she spends almost all her spare time doing for others. After she had been off the show for a year, she asked to come back, and everybody in the cast was in favor of it. We all thought a lot of her, and we didn't feel that it was our right to judge her. So she came back and has established herself again as a very gifted performer who can both sing and do comedy. She's very popular with the rest of the cast.

Then there are those sweet things who provide the female beauty for the show, and if there is anybody alive who appreciates female beauty, it's old Arch. Their names are Kathy Baker, Linda Thompson, Misty Rowe, Gunilla Hutton, Marianne Gordon, Lisa Todd, and McKenzie Colt. Now, these girls do more than just decorate the set. Every one of them is a talented performer in her own right.

Let me tell you a little story about Kathy Baker, the little blonde girl who signs off each show with "That's all!" Kathy was an artist originally and a good one. She was working on the set as a designer when "Hee Haw" first got started. Well, she was just so darned cute that the producers asked her to do a skit or two, and she did them so well that she became a standard part of the show.

Gunilla Hutton plays Nurse Goodbody in my doctor skit,



Misty Rowe (left) and Barbi Benton (right) with strange-looking bunny.

and she's a great girl. Gunilla was one of the featured players in the old "Petticoat Junction" TV series a few years back, and I'll guarantee you that she is just as delectable looking now as she was then. She just never seems to get any older.

Little Misty Rowe, who does the used car bit with Junior Samples, is a feisty little thing who keeps things stirred up on the set. Once when we were taping the show she decided she was going to knock my hairpiece off my head. Now, I've worn a rug for about twenty years for a very simple reason: there ain't no hair up there. Misty was up on the haywagon in this scene, and she had a broom. She kept taking that broom and trying to dislodge my rug with it, and she got it all the way off once. I kept telling her to quit, and she kept on doing it. Finally I got a little provoked and I said, "Misty, if you don't quit that, I'm going to yank you down off that wagon and spank your little ass right here on the set!" They had to stop taping for a while. But I love her, even if she is a little devil sometimes, and I'll tell you something else about her. She is truly a fine actress. I've seen her do a couple of dramas on TV, and she is awfully good.

Lisa Todd is the most voluptuous lady in the cast, and from the low-cut outfits she wears and the parts she plays you might think she was really a swinger. Actually, she is the quietest and most reserved of all the girls. Marianne Gordon and Linda Thompson are both married to very famous husbands, but I'm glad they've chosen to stay on with us. Marianne, of course, is married to Kenny Rogers, and Linda's husband is the great Olympic hero, Bruce Jenner.

I've saved Junior Samples for last, because you have to leave a lot of space for Junior. He's bigger than life. Junior is a pure old country boy from Cummings, Georgia, who



Cuddling in the "Hee Haw" haystack with Misty Rowe. There are worse ways to make a living.

made it big on "Hee Haw." I hate to keep repeating this, but it's probably more true about Junior than anyone else—he's real, he's genuine. He is an absolutely pure, unsophisticated country comic.

Junior first attracted attention when he made a recording of a fishing story about catching a whopper in his home town. It was a real discovery, because most of the comics in our business have been through the mill, and they've learned a lot of tricks. Junior had absolutely none. He was just talking the way he always talked.

When "Hee Haw" got going pretty good, the CBS brass didn't quite know how to cope with Junior. I remember when we were given a big party at the City Club in Nashville, which is about the most exclusive club in town, and lot of CBS executives from New York and Hollywood were there. All of us dressed up as fancy as we could, all of us except Junior, that is. He came in tee shirt and overalls.

Everybody was being very nice and proper, and somebody introduced Junior to Perry Lafferty, who was one of the CBS vice-presidents. They said, "Junior, this is the vice-president."

Well, this was during the first Nixon administration, and the only vice-president that Junior had ever heard about was Agnew. So he said, "Oh, ole Spiro, huh?" Everybody else was a little embarrassed about it, but Perry just laughed. Then they told Junior his right name, and Junior started calling him "Purry." He'd say, "That calls for another drink, Purry," and Lafferty was just falling out. Before you knew it, they were the best of friends. Some time later Junior was in Hollywood and decided he would drop in on his old friend "Purry." Lafferty had a big fine office there in the CBS studios, and when Junior showed up in his overalls, the secretaries didn't want to let him in. But "Purry" spotted him and gave him a VIP tour of the place.

Some of us fixed it up with CBS to do a "This is your

Life" show on Junior. He was in the Los Angeles area doing some shows, and they lured him to the CBS studio by telling him they wanted him to do a couple of days of commercials. They had to get his family to the coast to be on the show, and Junior's wife Grace wouldn't fly. So the family all loaded up in a station wagon and started driving from Nashville, and, of course, that takes some time.

Well, in the meantime, everybody had a job of trying to keep Junior in Los Angeles without telling him about "This is Your Life." Ralph Edwards is as straight as he can be, and he won't allow any fake scenes on the show. A surprise has to be a real surprise. After a couple of days, Junior was getting edgy. He kept calling home and not getting any answer, and he was worried. He would ask people, "Where's Grace?" Finally he called Grace's sister back in Nashville late one night. He said, "Now I want to know where Grace is."

She said, "She's probably out slopping the hogs."

And Junior said, "At twelve o'clock at night?"

We kept him there on the pretext of having to do the commercials over and over, and finally the big moment came. His family got there, and we hid them backstage. Junior was supposed to be doing a commercial with Lisa, the "Hee Haw" girl who is abundantly endowed. Well, they had made him do it over several times, and finally he got so mad that he just doubled up his fist, ready to hit Lisa or anybody that got in his way. At just that time Ralph Edwards came on and said, "Junior Samples, This is Your Life!"

Junior looked at him for a second, and then he just broke down and bawled like a baby! When I came out later on the show and they said, "Here's one of your best friends," he broke down and bawled some more. Junior's quite a guy.

Of course, the cast is just the part of the show that the



Trying to convince Hugh Hefner that I would make an ideal Playboy bunny.

audience sees, and there are some great people behind the scenes who deserve more credit for the show's success than most of us do. The two men who originated the show, John Aylesworth and Frank Peppiatt, are still with

us, and that's a long time for top executives to stay with one show in television. Sam Luvello, the man who saved "Hee Haw" back when CBS dropped the show, is still our producer, and he's the hardest worker I ever saw. Our director, Bob Boatman, is a quiet, gentle sort of guy who just works like a dog. He came to Nashville several years ago and fell in love with the town and with a pretty girl there, and so he just married her and stayed. Then there's Nick Vanoff who is sort of the overlord of the whole operation. Nick's a very successful producer and director and spends most of his time in Hollywood, I guess, and we don't get to see him as often as we used to.

I don't want to be accused of apple-polishing, but I've said it before and I'm glad to say it again—"Hee Haw" is the happiest show business family I've ever been involved with. The reason is that these people at the top, the owners and producers and directors, have been compassionate men who always put their entertainers first. Whenever any of us need help, they're there to give it to us. Being a part of that family has been the greatest experience of my professional life.

An Old Love

Now I'm going to talk about a life-long love—art. I can't remember when I didn't get a thrill out of sketching or drawing or painting a picture on paper or canvas. It always seemed to me to be just about the finest thing a person could do, and all through my growing-up years I dreamed of the day when I would make my living by painting. It didn't exactly turn out that way. I got sort of side-tracked into country music, and that turned out to be a happy and prosperous detour. But in the long run, my success in the entertainment world has turned out to be a big plus as far as my painting is concerned. I've usually had the spare time that it takes to do my painting, and also I've been able to afford the finest equipment. I don't really put a lot of value on material things for the most part, but I don't mind saying that I'm as proud as a peacock of the art studio I have on the top floor of our new home in the Powell Community of Knox County. I had a special lighting system installed, and now whenever I paint, no matter if it's pitch dark outside, I have light in my studio that is the same thing as genuine daylight so that I can distinguish the color tones. I always brag about that when people come to visit us.

In the beginning, back there in Bulls Gap, I'm not sure whether I wanted to be an artist because I loved art so much or because it represented a way out for me—maybe some of both. You see, the only kind of work that anybody had around Bulls Gap was farm work, hard, laboring, endless farm work. I knew that somehow I had to get away from that. I'm not knocking the people who do it—my family has always done it—but it just wasn't for me. It just didn't reward me, somehow.

I remember a time when the merits of farm labor versus painting came into pretty sharp contrast for me. I was somewhere in my early teens, I guess, and times were hard, as they always were at the Campbell house. You have to remember that this was a long time ago, and there wasn't government relief or food stamps or anything like that back then. You either worked and made some money or you just plain starved to death.

A bunch of the boys used to go down to the general store there in Bulls Gap every morning and just lay around waiting to see if anybody needed hands—they called them hands—to help pull up hay or do any sort of work like that. My brother Harold, who was five years older than I was, was one of them, and he started taking me along when I was big enough. Well, one morning we were sitting there, and along came a man named Steel McCravey, who owned a big farm up the way. He had a pickup truck, and he said, "I need some hands to pull up hay, and any of you boys interested can hop on." So everybody hopped on, including me. I was the youngest and smallest of the bunch, and old Steel McCravey gave me a second look. Then he said, "Okay, Arch, you can come, too."

The pay was seventy-five cents a day and your dinner (that's country for lunch). We worked in the bottom land, where the creek had gotten up and put dirt all over the hay. We worked all day from early morning till dark, and

the heat was terrible and all that dust kept settling in my nose. The only good thing about it was the dinner. I was worn to a frazzle. As we walked back home when the day was over, my brother Harold and I dropped off a friend, Robert Cantrell, at his house, and Harold said, "We'll see you tomorrow, Robert."

I said, "You may see him tomorrow, but you sure ain't going to see me. That kind of work is for mules."

Harold got mad. He said, "You had better not think you're going to lay around and let the rest of us work. If you're going to eat, you're going to work."

He jumped on me again in the morning. He even dragged me out on the floor and told me to get up and get to work. But I was as stubborn as I could be. I still had an awful headache from all that dust and chaff the day before, and I just wasn't going back. My mother even came in and tried to get me to go, and it was hard to turn her down because she was the sweetest thing that ever lived. But I said, "Mama, my head is killing me, and I just can't go." I know she was disappointed because we really needed the money.

Now, I've remarked before about how fate seems to step in and take a hand sometimes when things look bad. That's what happened that day. After my brother had gone off to work in the fields, I got up and wandered out on the front porch. I was feeling a little better, and, to tell the truth, I was a little ashamed of myself, too. Well, along came Mrs. Tubbs in her old Dodge touring car, and she stopped in front of the house. Mrs. Tubbs was a real nice lady whose husband was a railroad man. She called out to me and said, "Arch, I've got a new Warm Morning, and I want you to help me out."

Back in those days everybody knew what a Warm Morning was. It was a stove that you could burn coal in, and a lot of people were closing up their fireplaces and getting a

Warm Morning instead because it heated the house a whole lot better. That's what Mrs. Tubbs had done.

"We closed up the fireplace, and it left a big hole up there on the wall about three feet square, and I wondered if you could paint me a picture to fit it," she said.

I said, "Yes mam, I sure can," and I jumped in that touring car as fast as I could.

I got me a board just the size to fit in the hole in the wall, and I took it out in the sun where I could get the colors right, and I painted the picture. It didn't take me more than three hours, because I knew exactly what I was going to paint before I started. Every artist always has a favorite picture that he draws, and mine was a landscape with a stream and a road and some big poplar trees and a house in the background. I didn't have anything to copy off of; I just painted from the picture that I had in my mind.

I gave it to Mrs. Tubbs, and she stuck it up on the wall above the fireplace and looked at it, and she was just tickled to death. She said, "That's exactly what I wanted, Arch. How much do I owe you?" I said that she didn't owe me anything because I painted just because I enjoyed doing it so much, and then she said something I've always remembered.

She said, "Now listen, Archie. You've studied painting, and you've worked at it, and that's your work up there on the wall and everybody ought to be paid for their work. Now, will three dollars be all right?"

Would three dollars be all right? You've got to remember that just the day before I had worked like a dog in the hay fields for seventy-five cents! I told Mrs. Tubbs that three dollars would be wonderful. She offered to run me home in her car, but I said I thought I could make it faster on foot. I don't think my feet hit the ground twice all the way back to my house. When I got there, I tore in through the

front door and started looking for my mother. When I found her, I said, "Look here, Mama," and I threw that three dollars down on the table in front of her.

She said, "Where in the world did you get that?" I think she might have been afraid that I had stolen it, because three dollars was an awful lot of money then.

I told her that I had painted a picture for Mrs. Tubbs. "Now do you see why I didn't go down there and pull up hay for Steel McCravey?" I said. "Harold is going to work four days to make what I made in three hours. I say that work is for mules and I'm not going to do it. I'm going to paint, and I'm going to make money!"

Well, I was very young, and I didn't realize that there wouldn't always be a Mrs. Tubbs around and that painters often have a harder time making it than most other people. But that experience set me hot on the road to being a painter, and I'm still on that road even though it turned out that I made my living in country music. One of the joys of painting is that you don't have to devote full time to it; you can paint for pleasure in your spare time. I'll admit that I've painted for something more than pleasure. I've sold a lot of paintings down through the years, and some of them have fetched some pretty good prices. I realize that my name helps sell my work, being in TV and radio and all. But I've got enough pride in my talent to think that it has had something to do with it, too. The toughest thing in the world to do is to judge yourself. In show business, for instance, it's impossible for me to say how good I am. The only thing I have to go by is how much money I get for personal appearances. As far as art is concerned, I know I'm not the best, and I don't think I'm the worst. I just hope I'm somewhere in the beautiful in-between.

I paint every day that I'm at home, sometimes an hour, sometimes two or three. I've learned from experience that you should quit painting as soon as you get tired. You



This country snow scene is my most popular painting.

should also stop if you find yourself getting in a hurry. If you keep on after you reach those stages, you're just going to screw it up.

The main thing about painting, as far as I'm concerned, is learning the basics. First, get the fundamentals down, because then you'll be able to learn much faster. Once you know about light and dark and highlights and shadows and something about perspective, then you can go on and paint from feeling. Your perspective does not have to be perfect; in fact, if it was, you might just as well take a photograph and forget about painting. One of my teachers once told me, "Learn perspective, and then forget it." I know what he meant. You learn, and then although you don't consciously think about it after that, you retain enough of it to carry you through.

Like all painters, I have my favorites among the works I have done. One is a simple country snow scene with a barn in the background and trees covered with snow. It seems to be everybody else's favorite, too, because I've sold about eight hundred copies of it. I have kept that original, although I've had a lot of good offers for it. I just don't want to part with it. I have sold some originals for fairly good prices, though, one for thirty-five hundred dollars.

I do pastoral scenes only. Every artist has his own special field, and that's mine. My paintings are of rural landscapes, rustic settings, old barns and houses and creeks and rivers and trees and winding roads—anything from the past that was a part of country life way back when. My art is just like my music. It's earthy and simple and it tells a story. I guess you could say that it's "country."

Just Old Arch

If there is one thing that I've learned in all these years in show business, it's to never stay on stage too long. So I figure I've been on this particular stage just about long enough, and I'm about ready to make my exit.

I've enjoyed doing this book. It has awakened a lot of old memories in me of long ago times and places and people, especially people, that meant so much to me. I have been awfully lucky down through the years to have so many good friends, like Lowell Blanchard and Chet Atkins and lots of others, and writing this book has helped me appreciate them even more. Of course, Lowell and too many other old friends are gone now, but they still live in my memory.

I'll tell you something else that I appreciate, and that's Knoxville, Tennessee. It's my hometown now and has been for a long time, although I still love little old Bulls Gap. The people in Knoxville have been great to me, better than I've deserved sometimes. Back there in my early days, I was a pretty wild one, and I used to run around with a lot of women, and I ran up a bunch of debts that I didn't pay off very fast, but somehow the Knoxville people have always forgiven me for my meanness.

When the CBS network announced that it was dropping "Hee Haw" a few years back, some people in Knoxville got up a petition and sent it to CBS urging that the show be kept on the air. You know, there were over two thousand signatures on it, hometown people who were trying to do something to help me. I didn't have anything to do with it; in fact, I didn't even know it was going on, and when I learned about it, I think it meant more to me than any old TV program. They talk about a prophet being without honor in his own country. Well, that doesn't apply in my case. I just wouldn't live any place except Knoxville, and Pudge wouldn't either.

I guess I really am old Grandpappy now. I'm sixty-six as this is being written, and I've got a beautiful eleven-year-old granddaughter, Christy, Steve's daughter. I've been around for a long time, and sometimes people ask me when I'm going to retire. Well, I've got a one-word answer for that. Never!

I've just signed a new eight-year contract with "Hee Haw," and after that one is finished, I'm figuring on signing a twenty-year contract with them. I'm just not about to retire as long as I enjoy working and feel like doing it. That doesn't mean I'm going to run all over the country doing concerts and banquets and so forth. I can afford to be selective about those things now, and I'm just going to do whatever appeals to me.

My sons, Steve and Phil, and I have formed a family corporation, and they are now the actual owners of a lot of the Archie Campbell enterprises. It may be that pretty soon I'll find myself working for them, and if that happens, that's okay by me. If they don't like the way I'm doing things, I'll just spank them. No, really, they're very bright, capable young men who probably make better decisions than I do. Pudge and I are lucky to have them.

My art occupies more of my time now than entertaining



The clan gathers at the Campbell home in Knox County. Left to right: Phil, Pudge, granddaughter Christy, Archie, and Steve.

does. I don't want to brag, but I could work from dawn to dusk every day and still not fill all the orders for my original paintings. So I just don't do too many originals any more; I concentrate on selling copies. I've just made a business arrangement with a couple of old friends, Raymond Loveday and Hazen Kreis, who have an art business that they operate out of Stuart, Florida, and they're going to handle the sale of my paintings for me.

I've been involved in humor most of my life, and humor is just right next door to philosophy. So I've developed a philosophy about life that I'll share with you before I sign off.

You remember that old line that Brother Dave Gardner, the comedian, used to deliver? He'd say, "When a man is down, kick him! If he rises above it and comes back and fights again he'll make it. If he just lies there and whines, he wouldn't have made it anyway."

Well, there's a lot of truth there. Of course, I don't think you should ever kick a man when he's down—that was just a joke—but I'll tell you one thing. This old world is going to hand you a lot of hard knocks along the way, and if you can take them, you're going to be one of those people who gets things done, who rises to the top. Just take our own country music business; a lot of us started out in the Depression days when there wasn't much money and not nearly enough jobs to go around. Not everybody made it through those times, but people like Roy Acuff did. You know why Roy made it? Not because he had the greatest talent in the world, although he has plenty of that, but because he was just as tough as an old mule. I don't claim that I'm as tough as Roy, but I made it, too, and I'm proud of it.

I guess I've always been a pretty competitive type of person. When I'm playing golf, for instance, I just love to win so much that I can hardly stand to lose. It just kills me.

Not that I'm a poor sport or anything; I always respect the man who beats me, and I don't get mad or anything like that. But I just love winning.

Now, you might think that competitive nature would carry over in my profession, but it doesn't. I don't believe in competition among performers. I believe in cooperation. Let me explain.

Recently a comic tried out for "Hee Haw," and Jack Burns was talking about him to me. He asked me, "Do you want to hire him? He's pretty good. Do you want him to take your place?"

I said, "If he's good enough to get it, he deserves it. There should always be room for somebody who is good enough," and I really believe that.

I believe in doing the very best that I can do at all times, but I don't think it should be aimed at beating somebody else out of something. I don't think you can ever really achieve anything at somebody else's expense. If you're worried about having to try and move somebody else out of your way, to me that means you don't have much confidence in yourself and the chances are you're not going to make it. I don't think I've ever lacked in self-confidence.

Country music has taken some different turns in recent years. It has changed a lot, and I think that's good. I'm not one of the old traditionalists who say that there's only one way it should be done. It's much more commercial than it used to be, and at times it seems to blend in with pop music so much that it's hard to tell them apart. For instance, would you say that Kenny Rogers is a country singer or a pop singer? Well, actually he's both. He's a combination of the two.

But I don't think that country music will ever lose its distinctive sound, no matter how much pop is blended in. You can add violins and horns and everything else to

a country song, and if you've got a real honest-to-God country singer singing it, well, it's still going to be country. Merle Haggard is an example of a good, pure country singer, and Johnny Cash is another. They've got that twang in their voices. Some sophisticated critics say that country singers sing through their noses, and maybe they're right. There aren't too many things up there to sing through.

And we've still got the old guitar with its distinctive country sound. You know, it's getting so nobody does much anymore in music without having a guitar chime in there somewhere. It's the "in" instrument now. I can remember thirty or forty years ago when you could walk down Gay Street in Knoxville with a guitar strung around your neck and people would think you were a bum. We country music folks were ahead of the times.

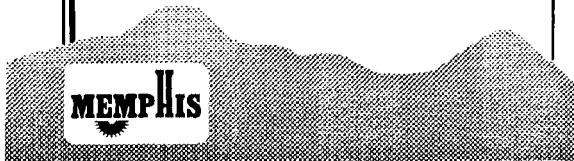
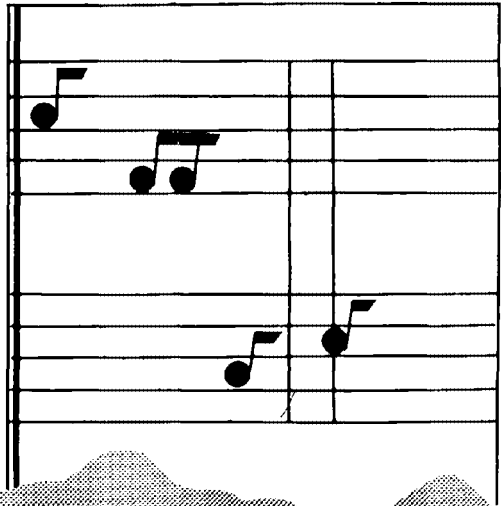
Well, I said I was going to get offstage, and I'm going to keep my word. But I'll be seeing you around. You just listen for the strum of an old guitar and the ring of a banjo and the cry of the fiddle. Old Arch will be there.

musician before he broke into radio in Knoxville.

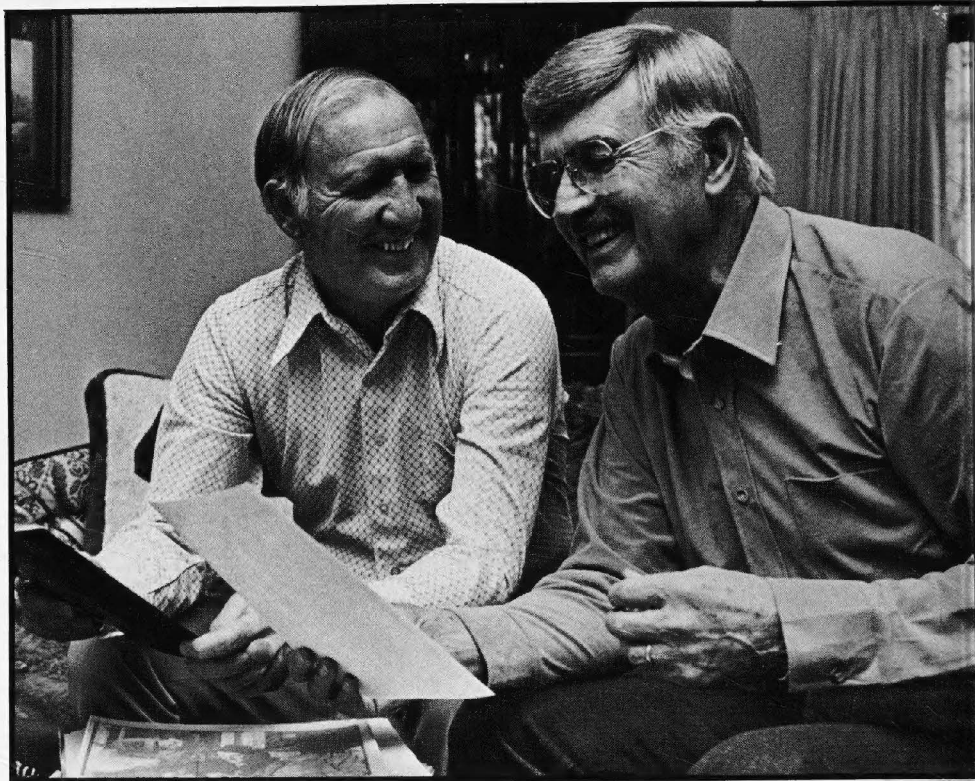
His World War Two days in the Navy and his wartime marriage are vividly pictured.

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Collaborating author Ben Byrd, shown here with longtime friend Archie Campbell, is the sports editor of The Knoxville Journal and a three-time winner of the Sportswriter of the Year award in the state of Tennessee.

"I have no better friend than Archie Campbell and I don't know a more interesting person. He wrote the biography of a lot of poor kids from Appalachia when he wrote this story. It's one of the most interesting I have ever heard."

—Chet Atkins

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